

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5321

As Passed House:

April 22, 2021

Title: An act relating to the college bound scholarship.

Brief Description: Expanding access to the college bound scholarship.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education & Workforce Development (originally sponsored by Senators Nobles, Das, Dhingra, Frockt, Hasegawa, Liias, Lovelett, Nguyen, Randall, Saldaña, Stanford and Wilson, C.).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 3/17/21, 3/24/21 [DPA];
Appropriations: 4/1/21 [DPA(APP w/o CWD)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/22/21, 60-37.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Eliminates the requirement that a student sign a pledge to be eligible for the College Bound Scholarship (CBS).
- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council to automatically enroll eligible students in the CBS program and for students to acknowledge receipt of their enrollment.
- Vests a student's right in the CBS program upon enrollment, assuming the student meets the requirements of the program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Hansen, Paul, Pollet, Sells and

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Sutherland.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Chambers, Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Hoff and Kraft.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Appropriations and without amendment by Committee on College & Workforce Development. Signed by 19 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Chopp, Cody, Dolan, Fitzgibbon, Frame, Hansen, Johnson, J., Lekanoff, Pollet, Ryu, Senn, Springer, Stonier, Sullivan and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Caldier, Chandler, Dye, Harris, Hoff, Jacobsen, Rude, Schmick and Steele.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Kate Henry (786-7349).

Background:

The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program was established in 2007 to provide guaranteed four-year tuition to students from low-income families. The first CBS awards were granted to the graduating high school class of 2012. Eligible students for the CBS include those who:

- qualify for free or reduced-price lunches in the seventh grade, eighth grade, or in certain circumstances, ninth grade; or
- are independent from parents or guardians, or are receiving extended foster care services; and
 - are in grades 7 through 12; or
 - are between the ages of 18 and 21 years and have not graduated from high school.

A student may also be eligible if they were a dependent who was adopted between the ages of 14 and 18 with a negotiated adoption agreement that includes continued eligibility in the CBS program.

Beginning in the seventh grade, eligible students are notified of their eligibility and the requirements for the scholarship. To be eligible for the CBS, a student must sign a pledge during the seventh or eighth grade that includes a commitment to graduate from high school with at least a C-average and no felony convictions.

To receive the CBS, the student must graduate having fulfilled the CBS pledge requirements. Upon graduation, the student's family income will be assessed and if it does not exceed 65 percent of the state median family income, the student will receive a scholarship. The CBS recipients that attend public two-year or four-year institutions of higher education receive an award to cover the cost of tuition and fees, minus any state-funded grant, scholarship, or waiver assistance. The CBS recipient also receives \$500 for books and materials. The student must maintain satisfactory academic progress and may not receive the scholarship for more than four full-time years.

Summary of Bill:

The requirement that a student sign a pledge in order to be eligible for the CBS is eliminated. The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) must automatically enroll all eligible students into the CBS program, with no action from the student, the student's family, or the student's guardians. The WSAC must notify an eligible student and their parents or guardians of the student's enrollment in the CBS program and the requirements for receiving a CBS award. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families must provide the WSAC with a list of eligible students when requested. The WSAC must develop effective methods to notify eligible students of their enrollment in the CBS program and the requirements to receive an award. To the maximum extent practicable, eligible students must acknowledge enrollment in the CBS program and receipt of the requirements to receive an award. The WSAC must also make available to every school district information, brochures, and posters to increase awareness and to enable school districts to notify eligible students directly or through school teachers, counselors, or school activities.

The Legislature intends to create a statutory contractual right for CBS students. The right of an eligible student to receive a CBS award vests upon enrollment in the CBS program, assuming the student meets the CBS program requirements.

The CBS students must enroll in a higher education institution no later than one academic year following high school graduation. The CBS students must use the four full-time years worth of scholarship awards within a five-year period.

The CBS program changes are retroactively applied to seventh-grade students beginning with the 2019-20 school year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (College & Workforce Development):

(In support) Research consistently shows that the CBS improves college enrollment and retention. Automatic enrollment would expand access to the CBS to students across the state. There are about 10,000 eligible students who do not receive the CBS because they do not return the pledge. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this as sign-up rates are 10 percentage points below last year. The pledge can be a barrier because a parent could have a brain injury, refuse to sign it, or not know they need to sign it. Chasing down paperwork is not an efficient use of time. This proposal removes the pledge requirement as a qualifier, while maintaining strong language to keep the state's contractual obligation. In order for this program to exist as a contractual obligation and as an entitlement, it is important to have criteria for students to achieve. There may be criteria other than a 2.0 GPA and lack of felony convictions that are more appropriate. Further increasing access to financial aid will help create pathways to economic security, tackle equity gaps, and raise educational attainment. Currently, different schools have different sign-up rates, but eliminating the pledge would remove these regional disparities. One in four kids do not know it is possible to attend college, and studies show that when students know about available aid, enrollment increases by 25 percent. An investment in students is also an investment in communities.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) None.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (College & Workforce Development): Senator Nobles, prime sponsor; Marc Webster, Washington Student Achievement Council; Jenee Myers-Twitchell, Washington STEM; Jude Ahmed, Washington Student Association; Shea Hamilton, Independent Colleges of Washington; Rosie Ayala, Foundation for Tacoma Students; Juliette Schindler Kelly, College Success Foundation; and Casey Parrott, TRiO Talent Search.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (College & Workforce Development): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.