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**SENATE BILL 5896**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2024 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Nobles, Hansen, Billig, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Nguyen, Trudeau, Valdez, and C. Wilson

AN ACT Relating to extending the terms of eligibility for the Washington college grant program, Washington college bound scholarship program, passport to college promise program, and passport to apprenticeship opportunities program; and amending RCW 28B.92.200, 28B.118.010, 28B.118.005, and 28B.117.030.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.92.200 and 2022 c 214 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The Washington college grant program is created to provide a statewide free college program for eligible participants and greater access to postsecondary education for Washington residents. The Washington college grant program is intended to increase the number of high school graduates and adults that can attain a postsecondary credential and provide them with the qualifications needed to compete for job opportunities in Washington.

(2) The office shall implement and administer the Washington college grant program and is authorized to establish rules necessary for implementation of the program.

(3) The legislature shall appropriate funding for the Washington college grant program. Allocations must be made on the basis of estimated eligible participants enrolled in eligible institutions of higher education or apprenticeship programs. All eligible students are entitled to a Washington college grant beginning in academic year 2020-21.

(4) The office shall award Washington college grants to all eligible students beginning in academic year 2020-21.

(5) To be eligible for the Washington college grant, students must meet the following requirements:

(a)(i) Demonstrate financial need under RCW 28B.92.205;

(ii) Receive one of the following types of public assistance:

(A) Aged, blind, or disabled assistance benefits under chapter 74.62 RCW;

(B) Essential needs and housing support program benefits under RCW 43.185C.220; or

(C) Pregnant women assistance program financial grants under RCW 74.62.030; or

(iii) Be a Washington high school student in the 10th, 11th, or 12th grade whose parent or legal guardian is receiving one of the types of public assistance listed in (a)(ii) of this subsection and have received a certificate confirming eligibility from the office in accordance with RCW 28B.92.225;

(b)(i) Be enrolled or accepted for enrollment for at least three quarter credits or the equivalent semester credits at an institution of higher education in Washington as defined in RCW 28B.92.030; or

(ii) Be enrolled in a registered apprenticeship program approved under chapter 49.04 RCW;

(c) Be a resident student as defined in RCW 28B.15.012(2) (a) through (e);

(d) File an annual application for financial aid as approved by the office; and

(e) Must not have earned a baccalaureate degree or higher from a postsecondary institution.

(6) Washington college grant eligibility may not extend beyond ((~~five~~)) six years or ((~~one hundred twenty-five~~)) 150 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

(7) Institutional aid administrators shall determine whether a student eligible for the Washington college grant in a given academic year may remain eligible for the ensuing year if the student's family income increases by no more than three percent.

(8) Qualifications for receipt and renewal include maintaining satisfactory academic progress toward completion of an eligible program as determined by the office and established in rule.

(9) Should a recipient terminate his or her enrollment for any reason during the academic year, the unused portion of the grant shall be returned to the state educational grant fund by the institution of higher education according to the institution of higher education's policy for issuing refunds, except as provided in RCW 28B.92.070.

(10) An eligible student enrolled on a part-time basis shall receive a prorated portion of the Washington college grant for any academic period in which he or she is enrolled on a part-time basis.

(11) The Washington college grant is intended to be used to meet the costs of postsecondary education for students with financial need. The student shall be awarded all need-based financial aid for which the student qualifies as determined by the institution.

(12) Students and participating institutions of higher education shall comply with all the rules adopted by the council for the administration of this chapter.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.118.010 and 2023 c 174 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

The office of student financial assistance shall design the Washington college bound scholarship program in accordance with this section and in alignment with the Washington college grant program in chapter 28B.92 RCW unless otherwise provided in this section. The right of an eligible student to receive a college bound scholarship vest upon enrollment in the program that is earned by meeting the requirements of this section as it exists at the time of the student's enrollment under subsection (2) of this section.

(1) "Eligible students" are those students who:

(a) Qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

(i) If a student qualifies in the seventh or eighth grade, the student remains eligible even if the student does not receive free or reduced-price lunches thereafter.

(ii) Beginning in the 2019-20 academic year, if a student qualifies for free or reduced-price lunches in the ninth grade and was previously ineligible during the seventh or eighth grade while he or she was a student in Washington, the student is eligible for the college bound scholarship program;

(b) Are dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and:

(i) In grade seven through 12; or

(ii) Are between the ages of 18 and 21 and have not graduated from high school; or

(c) Were dependent pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW and were adopted between the ages of 14 and 18 with a negotiated adoption agreement that includes continued eligibility for the Washington state college bound scholarship program pursuant to RCW 74.13A.025.

(2)(a) Every eligible student shall be automatically enrolled by the office of student financial assistance, with no action necessary by the student, student's family, or student's guardians.

(b) Eligible students and the students' parents or guardians shall be notified of the student's enrollment in the Washington college bound scholarship program and the requirements for award of the scholarship by the office of student financial assistance. To the maximum extent practicable, an eligible student must acknowledge enrollment in the college bound scholarship program and receipt of the requirements for award of the scholarship.

(c) The office of the superintendent of public instruction and the department of children, youth, and families must provide the office of student financial assistance with a list of eligible students when requested. The office of student financial assistance must determine the most effective methods, including timing and frequency, to notify eligible students of enrollment in the Washington college bound scholarship program. The office of student financial assistance must take reasonable steps to ensure that eligible students acknowledge enrollment in the college bound scholarship program and receipt of the requirements for award of the scholarship. The office of student financial assistance shall 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.

(3) Except as provided in subsection (4) of this section, an eligible student must:

(a)(i) Graduate from a public high school under RCW 28A.150.010, an approved private high school under chapter 28A.195 RCW in Washington, or have received home-based instruction under chapter 28A.200 RCW; and

(ii) For eligible students enrolling in a postsecondary educational institution for the first time beginning with the 2023-24 academic year, graduate with at least a "C" average for consideration of direct admission to a public or private four-year institution of higher education;

(b) Have no felony convictions;

(c) Be a resident student as defined in RCW 28B.15.012(2) (a) through (e); and

(d) Have a family income that does not exceed 65 percent of the state median family income at the time of high school graduation.

(4)(a) An eligible student who is a resident student under RCW 28B.15.012(2)(e) must also provide the institution, as defined in RCW 28B.15.012, an affidavit indicating that the individual will file an application to become a permanent resident at the earliest opportunity the individual is eligible to do so and a willingness to engage in any other activities necessary to acquire citizenship, including but not limited to citizenship or civics review courses.

(b) For eligible students as defined in subsection (1)(b) and (c) of this section, a student may also meet the requirement in subsection (3)(a) of this section by receiving a high school equivalency certificate as provided in RCW 28B.50.536.

(5)(a) For students attending two or four-year institutions of higher education as defined in RCW 28B.10.016, the value of the award shall be (i) the difference between the student's tuition and required fees, less the value of any state-funded grant, scholarship, or waiver assistance the student receives; (ii) plus five hundred dollars for books and materials.

(b) For students attending private four-year institutions of higher education in Washington, the award amount shall be the representative average of awards granted to students in public research universities in Washington or the representative average of awards granted to students in public research universities in Washington in the 2014-15 academic year, whichever is greater.

(c) For students attending private vocational schools in Washington, the award amount shall be the representative average of awards granted to students in public community and technical colleges in Washington or the representative average of awards granted to students in public community and technical colleges in Washington in the 2014-15 academic year, whichever is greater.

(6) Eligible students must enroll no later than the fall term, as defined by the institution of higher education, one academic year following high school graduation. ((~~Eligible students may receive no more than four full-time years' worth of scholarship awards within a five-year period~~)) College bound scholarship eligibility may not extend beyond six years or 150 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

(7) Institutions of higher education shall award the student all need-based and merit-based financial aid for which the student would otherwise qualify. The Washington college bound scholarship is intended to replace unmet need, loans, and, at the student's option, work-study award before any other grants or scholarships are reduced.

(8) The first scholarships shall be awarded to students graduating in 2012.

(9) The eligible student has a property right in the award, but the state of Washington retains legal ownership of tuition units awarded as scholarships under this chapter until the tuition units are redeemed. These tuition units shall remain separately held from any tuition units owned under chapter 28B.95 RCW by a Washington college bound scholarship recipient.

(10) ((~~The scholarship award must be used within five years of receipt. Any unused scholarship tuition units revert to the Washington college bound scholarship account.~~

~~(11)~~)) Should the recipient terminate his or her enrollment for any reason during the academic year, the unused portion of the scholarship tuition units shall revert to the Washington college bound scholarship account.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.118.005 and 2007 c 405 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

The legislature intends to inspire and encourage all Washington students to dream big by creating a guaranteed ((~~four-year~~)) tuition scholarship program for students from low-income families who enroll within one year of high school graduation. The legislature finds that, too often, financial barriers prevent many of the brightest students from considering college as a future possibility. Often the cost of tuition coupled with the complexity of finding and applying for financial aid is enough to prevent a student from even applying to college. Many students become disconnected from the education system early on and may give up or drop out before graduation. It is the intent of the legislature to alert students early in their educational career to the options and opportunities available beyond high school.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.117.030 and 2019 c 470 s 23 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The office shall design and, to the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, implement, passport to careers with two programmatic pathways: The passport to college promise program and the passport to apprenticeship opportunities program. Both programs offer supplemental scholarship and student assistance for students who were under the care of the state foster care system, tribal foster care system, or federal foster care system, and verified unaccompanied youth or young adults who have experienced homelessness.

(2) The office shall convene and consult with an advisory committee to assist with program design and implementation. The committee shall include but not be limited to former foster care and unaccompanied homeless youth and their advocates; representatives from the state board for community and technical colleges, public and private agencies that assist current and former foster care recipients and unaccompanied youth or young adults experiencing homelessness in their transition to adulthood; student support specialists from public and private colleges and universities; the state workforce training and education coordinating board; the employment security department; and the state apprenticeship council.

(3) To the extent that sufficient funds have been appropriated for this purpose, a student is eligible for assistance under this section if he or she:

(a)(i) Was in the care of the state foster care system, tribal foster care system, or federal foster care system in Washington state at any time before age twenty-one subsequent to the following:

(A) Age fifteen as of July 1, 2018;

(B) Age fourteen as of July 1, 2019; and

(C) Age thirteen as of July 1, 2020; or

(ii) Beginning July 1, 2019, was verified on or after July 1st of the prior academic year as an unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, before age twenty-one;

(b) Is a resident student, as defined in RCW 28B.15.012(2), or if unable to establish residency because of homelessness or placement in out-of-state foster care under the interstate compact for the placement of children, has residency determined through verification by the office;

(c) Is enrolled with or will enroll on at least a half‑time basis with an institution of higher education or a registered apprenticeship or recognized preapprenticeship in Washington state by the age of twenty‑one;

(d) Is making satisfactory academic progress toward the completion of a degree, certificate program, or registered apprenticeship or recognized preapprenticeship, if receiving supplemental scholarship assistance;

(e) Has not earned a bachelor's or professional degree; and

(f) Is not pursuing a degree in theology.

(4) The office shall define a process for verifying unaccompanied homeless status for determining eligibility under subsection (3)(a)(ii) of this section. The office may use a letter from the following persons or entities to provide verification: A high school or school district McKinney-Vento liaison; the director or designated staff member of an emergency shelter, transitional housing program, or homeless youth drop-in center; or other similar professional case manager or school employee. Students who have no formal connection with such a professional may also submit to the office an essay that describes their experience with homelessness and the barriers it created to their academic progress. The office may consider this essay in lieu of a letter of homelessness determination and may interview the student if further information is needed to verify eligibility.

(5) A passport to college promise program is created.

(a) A passport to college promise scholarship under this section:

(i) Shall not exceed resident undergraduate tuition and fees at the highest‑priced public institution of higher education in the state; and

(ii) Shall not exceed the student's financial need, when combined with all other public and private grant, scholarship, and waiver assistance the student receives.

(b) ((~~An eligible student may receive a passport~~)) Passport to college promise scholarship ((~~under this section for a maximum of five years after the student first enrolls with an institution of higher education or until the student turns age twenty~~‑~~six, whichever occurs first. If a student turns age twenty~~‑~~six during an academic year, and would otherwise be eligible for a scholarship under this section, the student shall continue to be eligible for a scholarship for the remainder of the academic year~~)) eligibility may not extend beyond six years or 150 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

(c) The office, in consultation with and with assistance from the state board for community and technical colleges, shall perform an annual analysis to verify that those institutions of higher education at which students have received a scholarship under this section have awarded the student all available need‑based and merit‑based grant and scholarship aid for which the student qualifies.

(d) In designing and implementing the passport to college promise student support program under this section, the office, in consultation with and with assistance from the state board for community and technical colleges, shall ensure that a participating college or university:

(i) Has a viable plan for identifying students eligible for assistance under this section, for tracking and enhancing their academic progress, for addressing their unique needs for assistance during school vacations and academic interims, and for linking them to appropriate sources of assistance in their transition to adulthood;

(ii) Receives financial and other incentives for achieving measurable progress in the recruitment, retention, and graduation of eligible students.

(e) To the extent funds are appropriated for this specific purpose, the office shall contract with at least one nongovernmental entity to provide services to support effective program implementation, resulting in increased postsecondary completion rates for passport scholars.

(6) The passport to apprenticeship opportunities program is created. The office shall:

(a) Identify students and applicants who are eligible for services under RCW 28B.117.030 through coordination of certain agencies as detailed in RCW 28B.117.040;

(b) Provide financial assistance through the nongovernmental entity or entities in RCW 28B.117.055 for registered apprenticeship and recognized preapprenticeship entrance requirements and occupational-specific costs that does not exceed the individual's financial need; and

(c) Extend financial assistance to any eligible applicant for ((~~a maximum of~~)) six years ((~~after first enrolling with a registered apprenticeship or recognized preapprenticeship, or until the applicant turns twenty-six, whichever occurs first~~)) or 150 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

(7) Recipients may utilize passport to college promise or passport to apprenticeship opportunities at different times, but not concurrently. The total award an individual may receive in any combination of the programs shall not exceed the equivalent amount that would have been awarded for the individual to attend a public university for ((~~five~~)) six years with the highest annual tuition and state-mandated fees in the state.

(8) Personally identifiable information shared pursuant to this section retains its confidentiality and may not be further disclosed except as allowed under state and federal law.

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