

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5999

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, January 17, 2024

Title: An act relating to expanding financial aid eligibility.

Brief Description: Expanding financial aid eligibility.

Sponsors: Senators Hansen, Nobles, Dhingra, Fortunato, Frame, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Kuderer, Lias, Lovelett, Nguyen, Pedersen, Randall, Saldaña, Salomon, Shewmake, Stanford, Trudeau, Valdez, Van De Wege and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/12/24, 1/17/24 [DP-WM].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases eligibility for the maximum Washington College Grant (WCG) award up to 70 percent of median family income.
- Modifies WCG awards for students between 71 and 100 percent of median family income.
- Entitles WCG students who are receiving the maximum WCG award, but who are not College Bound Scholarship recipients, to a bridge grant, which is an additional annual stipend for expenses beyond tuition and fees.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Nobles, Chair; Hansen, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Hawkins.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

Background: Washington College Grant. The State Need Grant was modified in 2019, and renamed the Washington College Grant (WCG). The WCG is the state's largest financial aid program, and provides awards to low-income students to pursue postsecondary education. The WCG is an entitlement program with guaranteed awards for those students who qualify. The WCG award amount varies based on the institution the student attends and the student's family income. For example, for students attending the state's public institutions, the maximum award is tuition and services and activities fees for 15 quarter credit hours or the equivalent. For students attending private, four-year, not-for-profit higher education institutions, in 2019-20 the maximum award was \$9,739. An eligible student may receive a WCG for five years or up to 125 percent of the published length of the student's program. Part-time students receive prorated awards.

Bridge Grant. In the 2022 supplemental operating budget and the 2023-25 biennial budget state funding was provided for a Bridge Grant of \$500 for WCG recipients receiving the maximum award. A student is eligible for the Bridge Grant if the student receives the maximum WCG award and does not receive the College Bound Scholarship. The Grant is an annual stipend awarded in addition to the WCG to provide supplementary financial support to low-income students to cover higher education expenses beyond tuition and fees, such as books, lab fees, supplies, technology, transportation, housing, and childcare.

Summary of Bill: Washington College Grant. The WCG income eligibility thresholds and award amounts apply:

Median Family Income (MFI)	Award Amount
0-70 percent of state MFI	maximum award
71-80 percent of state MFI	50 percent of maximum award
81-90 percent of state MFI	25 percent of maximum award
91-100 percent of state MFI	10 percent of maximum award

Bridge Grants. Bridge Grants are \$500 annual stipends provided in addition to the WCG to provide supplementary financial support to low-income students to cover higher education expenses beyond tuition and fees.

WCG recipients who are receiving a maximum WCG award are also entitled to receive a Bridge Grant, except those who are also College Bound Scholarship recipients.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill will benefit other underrepresented students in my community so that they can pursue their dreams. I am a grateful recipient of the Washington College Grant. This has not only helped me achieve my academic aspirations, but also find issues that I am passionate about. I speak before you as a testament to the power of financial aid. Supporting this bill is not just an investment in education, it embodies equitable opportunities for all. The WCG is a gateway to education and a brighter future. This enables students to focus on their studies. It is worth emphasizing the significant impact on underrepresented communities. As a working adult, the WCG is exactly the help we needed to enroll in higher education. Increasing eligibility will be the difference between my family having out of pocket costs for college next year or not. Expanding further to help more middle income students will give more students the opportunity to pursue college. Expanding this grant will allow students all over Washington to pursue a higher education. The college grant is doing exactly what it was meant to do, enabling opportunities for the students most in need of our support. If you make \$73,000 today your tuition bill is zero. If you make \$74,000, your tuition bill may be as high as \$5,000. You could address this with a more gradual phase-out of the award. Modifying the grant will enhance our state's workforce. I come from a background where financial limitations are typically a significant barrier to college. The WCG has provided me the resources and opportunities to succeed. I would not be here without it. Income level does not tell the full story. There are so many extenuating factors. Many students are working multiple jobs and are in danger of being unable to continue their education because of finances. I would not be where I am today without the WCG. I know there are others just like me who make a little more money and do not have this option. Expanded financial aid allows students to focus on their college success. Expanded aid will keep more people in school.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Angelita Cervantes, Communities for Our College; Bernadette Jungblut, Central Washington University Faculty; Sam Ligon, Eastern Washington University Faculty; Jacob Vigdor, University of Washington Faculty; Isela Bonilla, Associated Students of WSU Vancouver; Kiyoki Carrillo-Camacho; Kylie Sickles, Associated Students of Washington State University Vancouver; Diana Luis-Contreras; Keara Ryan, Associated Students of Western Washington University; Samuel Crawford, WSUV; Abigail Chandos, ASWSU Global Campus; Leah Sishu; Malik Cantu, Associated Students of Central Washington University; Sheila Gray; Kaitlynn Albenesius, Legislative Liaison of the District of Pierce College; Jacob Feleke, ASUW-Seattle President; Cher Aguilar Henriquez; Rae Watkins, Students of South Puget Sound Community College .

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.