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**HOUSE BILL 2593**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2016 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Kilduff, Zeiger, Moscoso, Bergquist, Rossetti, McBride, Stanford, S. Hunt, Gregerson, Santos, Goodman, Pollet, and Hickel

AN ACT Relating to making community and technical colleges more affordable by eliminating the application fee for low-income students and reviewing placement testing fees; adding a new section to chapter 28B.50 RCW; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds:

(a) Washington's community and technical college system plays an essential role in the state's higher education program;

(b) Washington's community and technical college system strives to provide affordable access to higher education for students statewide, and one of the stated purposes of the community and technical college system is to offer an open door to every citizen, regardless of his or her academic background or experience, at a cost normally within his or her economic means;

(c) According to the Washington student achievement council, in the 2013-14 academic year, tuition at the state's community and technical colleges' was eight and four-tenths percent higher than the national average, and Washington ranked sixteenth highest among the fifty states in the cost of community college tuition;

(d) Although the legislature reduced tuition for higher education in 2015, the overall cost of attending college is still a barrier for many students. According to a 2014 report from the Washington state education data center, the average loan amount for students attending community and technical colleges was approximately six thousand dollars per year, which is significant for low-income students.

(2) The legislature therefore declares that affordability issues and perceived barriers to affordability can be reduced by waiving the application fee in the community and technical college system for low-income students.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28B.50 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The college board shall coordinate with the community and technical colleges to implement a uniform statewide program to waive the application fee for any individual applying for admission to a community or technical college who:

(a) Is a resident student, as defined in RCW 28B.15.012; and

(b) Whose income, at the time the individual is applying for admission to a community or technical college, is at or below seventy percent of the state median family income adjusted for family size.

(2) "Application fee" means the processing fee the community or technical college requires an individual to pay when submitting an application for admission. "Application fee" does not include placement testing fees.

(3) The uniform application fee waiver program must be in effect at all community and technical colleges by the time the community and technical colleges begin accepting applications for admission for the fall 2017 term.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1)(a) The state board for community and technical colleges shall coordinate with the community and technical colleges to determine the amount of forgone revenue each college experienced for the 2017-18 academic year as a result of implementing the application fee waiver program established in section 2 of this act.

(b) To better assess the use, effectiveness, and costs of placement tests given to entering students, the state board for community and technical colleges shall review the operation and impact of placement testing administered at the community and technical colleges.

(2) By December 1, 2018, the state board for community and technical colleges must submit a report to the governor and the higher education and fiscal committees of the legislature.

(a) Regarding the application fee waiver program, the report must include, at a minimum:

(i) Information on the fiscal impact the waiver program has had on the colleges for the 2017-18 academic year;

(ii) An estimate of the annual revenue the colleges expect to forgo as a result of the application fee waiver program; and

(iii) A recommendation on the feasibility of community and technical colleges to offset any reduction in revenue from the waiver program by implementing a tiered application fee structure for students with incomes above seventy percent of median family income adjusted for family size.

(b) For the purposes of assessing the operation and impact of placement testing, the report must include, at a minimum:

(i) The number of placement tests taken by entering students;

(ii) A description of how, and to what extent, the community and technical colleges use placement tests in determining students' academic skill levels;

(iii) The costs to the community and technical colleges of administering placement tests and analyzing test results;

(iv) The costs to students for taking placement tests;

(v) The number and percentage of students who have matriculated in the previous four years along with the number of and percentage of matriculating students who have taken placement tests; and

(vi) Recommendations on how to eliminate or minimize the cost of placement tests to low-income students.

(3) This section expires August 1, 2019.

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