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**HOUSE BILL 2955**

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

**By** Representatives Hansen, Stanford, Ormsby, Frame, and Haler

AN ACT Relating to creating the Washington free to finish college program; amending RCW 28B.76.540; adding a new chapter to Title 28B RCW; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that the cost of higher education is often a barrier for students and recognizes that in order to meet the legislature's educational attainment goal of having at least seventy percent of Washington adults obtain a postsecondary credential by 2023, more needs to be done to encourage Washingtonians to go back to college. Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to make college free for any resident who attended a postsecondary education degree or certificate program and left with fifteen quarter or semester credits left or less and was not enrolled in an institution of higher education the prior quarter or semester, to return to complete his or her program of study.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Gift aid" means financial aid received from the federal Pell grant, the state need grant program under chapter 28B.92 RCW, the college bound scholarship program under chapter 28B.118 RCW, the opportunity grant program under chapter 28B.50 RCW, the opportunity scholarship program under chapter 28B.145 RCW, or any other state grant or scholarship program that provides funds for educational purposes with no obligation of repayment. Student loans and work study programs are not "gift aid."

(2) "Office" means the office of student financial assistance, as established under chapter 28B.76 RCW.

(3) "Program" means the Washington free to finish college program created in this chapter.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The Washington free to finish college program is established to encourage Washington residents who attended a postsecondary education degree or certificate program, but were unable to graduate and are no longer enrolled in a postsecondary education degree or certificate program, to return to an institution of higher education to complete their program of study. To be eligible for the program, a student needs to:

(a) Be a resident of the state, as defined in RCW 28B.15.012(2) (a) through (e);

(b) Not previously have earned a postsecondary degree or certificate;

(c) Have not been enrolled at an institution of higher education the prior quarter or semester;

(d) Have no more than fifteen quarter credits or fifteen semester credits remaining in his or her program of study; and

(e) Submit the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) or the Washington application for state financial aid.

(2) The program shall be administered by the office, which may adopt rules necessary to administer the program.

(3) Subject to the availability of funding, the office shall award grants to students who meet the criteria in subsection (1) of this section for an amount equal to the cost of tuition and fees as defined in RCW 28B.15.020 and services and activities fees as defined in RCW 28B.15.041, less any gift aid received.

(4) The program shall not result in a reduction of any federal or state gift aid.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  By December 1, 2017, and every December 1st thereafter, the office shall report to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the legislature regarding the impact of the program, including:

(1) The number of applicants;

(2) The number of students served;

(3) Program costs;

(4) Participant demographics;

(5) Enrollment status, meaning part time versus full time;

(6) Field of study; and

(7) Any other information deemed relevant.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The office shall contract with a third party to complete an evaluation of the program. The evaluation must address the impacts and cost of the program, and it must include an assessment of student support services provided to students who qualify for the program, including whether the student support services are considered effective at helping students succeed at college. A report on the evaluation is due to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the legislature by November 1, 2020.

(2) This section expires August 1, 2021.

**Sec.**  RCW 28B.76.540 and 2011 1st sp.s. c 11 s 111 are each amended to read as follows:

In addition to administrative responsibilities assigned in this chapter, the office shall administer the programs set forth in the following statutes: RCW 28A.600.100 through 28A.600.150 (Washington scholars); chapter 28B.85 RCW (degree-granting institutions); chapter 28B.92 RCW (state need grant); chapter 28B.12 RCW (work-study); RCW 28B.15.543 (tuition waivers for Washington scholars); RCW 28B.15.760 through 28B.15.766 (math and science loans); RCW 28B.15.100 (reciprocity agreement); RCW 28B.15.730 through 28B.15.734 (Oregon reciprocity); RCW 28B.15.750 and 28B.15.752 (Idaho reciprocity); RCW 28B.15.756 (British Columbia reciprocity); chapter 28B.101 RCW (educational opportunity grant); chapter 28B.102 RCW (future teachers conditional scholarship); chapter 28B.108 RCW (American Indian endowed scholarship); chapter 28B.109 RCW (Washington international exchange scholarship); chapter 28B.115 RCW (health professional conditional scholarship); chapter 28B.119 RCW (Washington promise scholarship); chapter 28B.--- RCW (the new chapter created in section 7 of this act)(Washington free to finish college program); and chapter 28B.133 RCW (gaining independence for students with dependents).

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 1 through 5 of this act constitute a new chapter in Title 28B RCW.

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