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**HOUSE BILL 1950**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Hansen, Springer, Stanford, Valdez, Thai, Bergquist, and Pollet

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

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that there are often many barriers for students wanting to pursue higher education, such as cost, competing commitments, and remedial needs. The legislature also recognizes that in order to meet the state'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 all types of Washingtonians to pursue higher education. In addition to encouraging recent high school graduates to attend a postsecondary institution, the legislature recognizes that untraditional students are an untapped resource to help fill skilled workforce demands. The legislature finds that there are many older adults who attended college, but did not earn a degree because they withdrew a few credits short of completing their program. The legislature finds that there are examples of programs, often referred to as recapture programs, which use outreach and tuition assistance to entice these adults to return to college to complete their degree. An example of such a recapture program was Western Washington University's destination graduation program. Destination graduation helped two hundred twenty-nine students return to Western Washington University and of those, one hundred eighty-one students graduated. Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to create a statewide recapture program to remove the barriers to reenrollment so these residents may return to college and complete a degree or certificate program as they originally intended to do.

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

(1) "Free to finish college grant" includes tuition 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, as defined in RCW 28B.145.010.

(2) "Institution of higher education" has the same meaning as in RCW 28B.10.016.

(3) "Office" means the office of student financial assistance created under chapter 28B.76 RCW.

(4) "Resident student" has the same meaning as in RCW 28B.15.012(2) (a) through (e).

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The Washington free to finish college program is established to encourage Washingtonians who attended a postsecondary institution, but left a few credits short of completing, to return to college to finish their degree or certificate program.

(2) A student must meet the following requirements to be eligible for the Washington free to finish college program:

(a) Be a resident of the state;

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

(c) Be admitted to the institution of higher education that the student last attended two or more years ago;

(d) Enroll in the institution of higher education on at least a part-time basis;

(e) Be considered by the institution of higher education to have satisfactory academic standing; and

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

(3) A student who meets the eligibility requirements in this section may be eligible for a free to finish college grant if the institution of higher education confirms that the student needs fifteen quarter credits or less, or the equivalent in semester credits, to finish his or her postsecondary certificate or degree.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The Washington free to finish college program shall be administered by the office, which may adopt rules necessary to administer the program.

(2) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the office, in collaboration with the institutions of higher education, shall award free to finish college grants to students who meet the requirements under section 3 of this act. The free to finish college grant may not result in a reduction of any federal or state gift aid.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The Washington state institute for public policy shall complete an evaluation of the Washington free to finish college program. The evaluation must include a cost benefit analysis of the program and an assessment of student support services provided to program participants, including the effectiveness of the student support services at helping students complete their degree or certificate program.

(2) The Washington state institute for public policy shall submit a report on the evaluation to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the legislature by November 1, 2025.

(3) This section expires January 1, 2026.

**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~~)) grants for undergraduate coursework); 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.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  If specific funding for the purposes of this act, referencing this act by bill or chapter number, is not provided by June 30, 2019, in the omnibus appropriations act, this act is null and void.

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