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**HOUSE BILL 2523**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2020 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Ortiz-Self, Slatter, Leavitt, Valdez, Pollet, and Bergquist; by request of Lieutenant Governor

AN ACT Relating to expanding access to higher education; adding new sections to chapter 28B.77 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.230 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28A.300 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature recognizes the increasing importance of postsecondary education as a tool for economic resilience and mobility, as well as the financial barriers many students in our state face in pursuing postsecondary education. The legislature also acknowledges Washington's low completion rate of the free application for federal student aid in comparison with other states, as well as other states' successes in increasing these rates by expanding supports for students and their families. Research has shown that increased completion of student aid applications in other states has led to increases in high school graduation and college matriculation, especially for students in underrepresented groups. In light of the 2019 expansion of the Washington college grant, it is also important to share information about new financial aid opportunities available to prospective postsecondary students. Given these facts, the legislature intends to undertake several actions to improve financial aid awareness and to increase coordination in this area among schools, districts, agencies, and institutions of higher education.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28B.77 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The council shall develop a centralized online statewide calculator tool for the purposes of estimating combined financial aid packages from the federal Pell grant and the Washington college grant program for all public four-year institutions of higher education in Washington state.

(2) The tool must provide a financial aid estimate based on the income of a student's parents or guardians and any expected family contribution.

(3) All public four-year institutions of higher education shall post this calculator on their respective web sites.

(4) The financial aid calculator must be for estimation purposes only and is not a guarantee of state aid. Neither this section nor the estimates provided by the financial aid calculator constitute an entitlement on the part of the state, and no institution, agency, or their agents or employees may be held liable for any estimates created through its usage.

(5) The financial aid calculator must be designed for anonymous use and may not be used to collect or share any data whatsoever.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28B.77 RCW to read as follows:

(1) In collaboration with the council of presidents, the Washington student achievement council shall develop clear, consistent standards for institutions of higher education to adopt regarding financial aid package award letters.

(2) By July 1, 2021, all public four-year and two-year institutions of higher education, as well as all independent colleges in Washington state, must adopt uniform terminology and a standardized template for financial aid award packages so that students may easily compare them.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.230 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Beginning with the 2020-21 school year, in coordination with the office of the superintendent of public instruction and the Washington student achievement council, all school districts with a high school must provide a financial aid advising day, as defined in section 5 of this act.

(2) The office of the superintendent of public instruction may adopt rules for the implementation of this section.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.300 RCW to read as follows:

(1)(a) Beginning with the 2020-21 school year and within existing resources, the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall coordinate and facilitate a financial aid advising day with all school districts with a high school.

(b) For the purposes of this section and section 4 of this act, a "financial aid advising day" means a day or series of days in September that includes, but is not limited to, dedicated time during regular school hours for staff to:

(i) Provide information to twelfth grade students on the free application for federal student aid and the Washington application for state financial aid;

(ii) As appropriate and whenever possible, assist twelfth grade students in completing the free application for federal student aid and the Washington application for state financial aid; and

(iii) In conjunction with the Washington student achievement council, distribute information on the Washington college grant and demonstrate the use of the college financial aid calculator created in section 2 of this act.

(c) Each school district may choose the date or series of dates on which to hold a financial aid advising day.

(2) The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall coordinate with the Washington student achievement council whenever possible to assist districts in facilitating opportunities outside of regular school hours for parents to take part in seminars on completing the free application for federal student aid and the Washington application for state financial aid. Whenever possible, districts shall provide spoken language interpreter services for limited English-speaking families.

(3) Students under eighteen years of age may choose to opt out of scheduled financial aid advising day activities with written consent from a parent or guardian. Students eighteen years of age or older may choose to opt out of financial aid advising day activities by signing a waiver.

(4) A student may not be penalized for failing to complete financial aid applications or for opting out of activities under subsection (3) of this section.

(5) Educational staff, including instructional, administrative, and counseling staff, may not be assessed or penalized on the basis of students' completion of financial aid forms or students' decisions to opt out under subsection (3) of this section.

(6)(a) Personally identifiable student or family information may not be collected or shared by a school or school district, the Washington student achievement council, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, or any other organization or individual participating in financial aid advising day.

(b) For purposes of this section, "personally identifiable information" includes, but is not limited to:

(i) Mailing or home addresses;

(ii) Social security numbers;

(iii) Immigration status of any person; and

(iv) Employment records.

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