

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5393

As of January 17, 2020

**Title:** An act relating to establishing a statewide free college program by changing the state need grant to the Washington college promise scholarship.

**Brief Description:** Establishing a statewide free college program by changing the state need grant to the Washington college promise scholarship.

**Sponsors:** Senators Palumbo, Rolfes, Frockt, McCoy, Wellman, Lias, Pedersen, Darneille, Dhingra, Van De Wege, Hunt, Wilson, C., Keiser and Kuderer; by request of Office of the Governor.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/22/19.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Washington College Promise Scholarship Program (WCPS) and replaces the State Need Grant.
- Makes the WCPS awards an entitlement.
- Modifies the maximum WCPS award to be the total cost of tuition and fees.

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Staff:** Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

**Background:** The State Need Grant (SNG) is the state's largest financial aid program that provides a need-based grant award for students to attend a postsecondary institution. To be eligible for the program, a student must:

- be a Washington State resident;
- attend an eligible institution of higher education and maintain satisfactory academic progress;
- enroll with a minimum of three credits as an undergraduate student;

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- be pursuing a first bachelor's degree, a certificate, or a first associate degree in any field excluding theology; and
- not owe repayment to another student aid program.

To receive a grant, the eligible student's family income must be less than 70 percent of the state's median family income (MFI). If the eligible student's family income falls below 50 percent of the state's MFI, the student is eligible to receive the maximum SNG award. If the student's family income is between 50 and 70 percent of the state's MFI, the award amount is prorated based on family income. In 2018-19 the state's 70 percent MFI cutoff amount for a family of four was \$61,500.

The student may receive a grant award to attend any eligible postsecondary institution in the state. Currently, there are 66 postsecondary institutions that are authorized to participate in the SNG program. The SNG awards vary based on the type of institution a student chooses to attend.

**Summary of Bill:** The WCPS is created and replaces the SNG program. The Office of Student Financial Assistance is responsible for implementing and administering WCPS. The Legislature must appropriate funding for the WCPS on the basis of estimated eligible participants enrolled in eligible institutions of higher education or apprenticeship programs. The caseload forecast council must estimate the number of students who are eligible for the program and are expected to attend an institution of higher education.

Eligibility. Students are eligible for the WCPS if the student:

- demonstrates financial need and has a family income at or below 70 percent of the state median family income, adjusted for family size;
- enrolls or has been accepted for enrollment for at least three quarter credits or the semester equivalent as an undergraduate student or is enrolled in a registered apprenticeship program; and
- is a Washington State resident.

Financial need is determined according to a system of needs analysis approved by the office of student financial assistance and includes demonstrating a financial inability to bear the total cost of education for any quarter or semester.

Award Levels. A maximum WCPS award is defined as an award equal to the cost of tuition and estimated fees for 15 quarter credit hours or the semester equivalent at a public institution of higher education. Students are eligible for:

- 100 percent of the maximum award if the students family income is between 0 and 50 percent of the state median family income, adjusted for family size;
- 70 percent of the maximum award if the students family income is between 51 and 55 percent of the state median family income, adjusted for family size;
- 65 percent of the maximum award if the students family income is between 56 and 60 percent of the state median family income, adjusted for family size;
- 60 percent of the maximum award if the students family income is between 61 and 65 percent of the state median family income, adjusted for family size; and
- 50 percent of the maximum award if the students family income is between 66 and 70 percent of the state median family income, adjusted for family size.

Award Levels by Institution of Enrollment. For students attending public two or four-year institutions the maximum award is the cost of tuition and estimate fees including operating fees, building fees, and services and activities fees.

For students attending private four-year institutions of higher education, the maximum award is the equivalent of the maximum award at the highest cost public institution, or the private institution's tuition, whichever is lesser.

For students attending private two-year institutions of higher education, the maximum award is the equivalent of the maximum award at the community and technical colleges, or the private institution's tuition, whichever is lesser.

For students attending approved apprenticeship programs, the maximum award is tuition and fees and required program supplies and equipment.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 17, 2019.

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

**Effective Date:** The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: By making the SNG an entitlement we are saying that regardless of economic downturns we value this as a guiding principle in higher education, that people should be able to get access to financial aid. Washington has been viewed as one of the strongest financial aid programs in the country. Some states have pulled ahead of us a bit with their free college programs. This bill puts Washington ahead of other states by guaranteeing that in the future no students will go unserved in our main financial aid program. This strategy helps boost our economy and improves equity of opportunity. There is a gap in the number of people earning credentials compared to what our workforce needs. This bill will help with that. By promising students that if they're eligible they will get financial aid this completely changes the message and creates predictability and stability for families so that can count on aid and not worry about the ebbs and flows of the economy. Coming from a family of six with a single mother the SNG has been life changing. Students have to juggle multiple costs including housing and the SNG relieves a large burden. The SNG has helped prevent other students at my college from dropping out by providing financial support. My mother was able to pursue a degree as an immigrant from Armenia because of the SNG. This helps future generations access that same opportunity. This bill will benefit students all over the state and all types of students accessing postsecondary education and will enable them to obtain the social capital necessary to succeed in today's economy. In the 2017-18 academic year there were more than 4000 students who qualified for the SNG but the independent colleges were only able to serve 75 percent of them because of underfunding of the program. We know financial considerations are part of a student's decision to go to college and fully funding the SNG alleviates this burden. Last year we left 18,000 students behind who were eligible but did not receive the SNG. Making this bill an entitlement prevents that. As the president of Tacoma Community College I know that I

would not be sitting here if it were not for federal and state financial aid. Programs like this help bright highly motivated students complete degrees. The SNG has changed my life by allowing me to access college. This has the potential to do that for many more students who can contribute to our society.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Guy Palumbo, Prime Sponsor; Yazmin Aguilar, Student Representative, Washington Student Achievement Council; Mike Meotti, Executive Director, Washington Student Achievement Council; Kelsey Hood, Vice President of External Affairs for the Graduate & Professional Student Senate at UW Seattle; Adan Espino, Legislative Liaison, Associated Students of UW Tacoma; Morgan Atwood, Director of Legislative Affairs for WSU Global; Lorrell Noahr, Washington Education Association; Kedrich Jackson, Trustee, Columbia Basin Community College; Mustapha Samateh, Student, Edmonds CC and CTC Student Association; Kristina Pogosian, Student, Tacoma CC and CTC Student Association; Mustapha Samateh, Student, Edmonds College; Tony Porter, St. Martin's University; Kristina Pogosian, Student, Tacoma Community College; Paul Francis, Council of Presidents; Terri Standish-Kuon, Independent Colleges of Washington; Ivan Harrell, President, Tacoma Community College; Paul Francis, Council of Presidents; Terri Standish-Kuon, Independent Colleges of Washington; Ivan Harrell, President, Tacoma Community College; Neil Strege, Washington Roundtable; Bill Lyne, United Faculty of Washington; Ana Betancourt, Associated Students of Washington State University Vancouver; Maddy Thompson, Office of the Governor, Senior Policy Advisor for Education and Higher Education; JoAnn Taricani, University of Washington, Faculty Legislative Representative; Juliette Schindler Kelly, College Success Foundation; Griselda Guevara-Cruz, WCAN and College Success Foundation; Essence Russ, Southwest Youth and Family Services; Amy Anderson, Association of Washington Business; Henry Pollet, Associated Students of Western Washington University.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** PRO: Eleni Papadakis, Workforce Board.