

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 1835

As Passed Senate - Amended, March 4, 2022

Title: An act relating to outreach and completion initiatives to increase postsecondary enrollment.

Brief Description: Creating outreach and completion initiatives to increase postsecondary enrollment.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Hansen, Leavitt, Santos, Simmons, Chopp, Slatter, Bergquist, Valdez, Pollet and Ormsby).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/11/22, 88-8.

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/17/22, 2/22/22 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/26/22, 2/28/22 [DPA, DNP, w/oRec].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate - Amended: 3/4/22, 27-21.

Brief Summary of Bill (As Amended by Senate)

- Requires the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) to conduct a statewide marketing campaign to promote the Washington College Grant.
- Establishes a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) Outreach and Completion Pilot Program.
- Establishes a State Library FAFSA and WASFA Outreach Pilot Program to have certain public libraries work with community-based organizations to increase FAFSA and WASFA completion rates.
- Makes changes to the Washington College Grant program to determine a student's financial need eligibility based on whether they are receiving benefits through a public assistance program.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Randall, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Liias and Sefzik.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Rolfes, Chair; Frockt, Vice Chair, Capital; Robinson, Vice Chair, Operating & Revenue; Billig, Carlyle, Conway, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Mullet, Pedersen, Van De Wege and Wellman.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Honeyford, Ranking Minority Member, Capital; Gildon, Muzzall, Rivers and Wagoner.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Wilson, L., Ranking Member; Brown, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Schoesler, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Braun and Warnick.

Staff: Michele Alishahi (786-7433)

Background: Financial Aid Applications. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the federal form that current and prospective students fill out to determine their eligibility for federal and state financial aid for attending postsecondary education institutions. The FAFSA asks a variety of questions based on federal income tax returns to determine a student's financial need, taking into account the student's dependency status, income, assets, family size, and other factors. Students without legal immigrant status are ineligible for federal financial aid. The Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) is an alternative form for students who cannot file a FAFSA, but may still be eligible for state financial aid. The WASFA is administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC).

Washington College Grant. The State Need Grant was modified in 2019 and renamed the Washington College Grant (WCG). The WCG is the state's largest financial aid program and provides awards to low-income students to pursue postsecondary education. The WCG is an entitlement program with guaranteed awards for those students who qualify. The WCG award amount varies based on the institution the student attends and the student's family income.

Summary of Amended Bill: Statewide Marketing Campaign. Subject to appropriation, WSAC must conduct a statewide marketing campaign to increase awareness of the WCG program. WSAC must issue a request for proposal to hire a marketing firm to produce high-quality advertisements to promote the WCG program. Advertisements should be marketed towards potential postsecondary education students and their parents with the goal of increasing awareness of the WCG to further the state's educational attainment goals. Advertisements may include television commercials, billboards, advertisements on public transit, paid Internet search advertisements, and social media marketing.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid and Washington Application For State Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Initiative. Subject to appropriation, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) must administer a FAFSA and WASFA outreach and completion initiative pilot program. SBCTC must select colleges to participate who are located within educational service districts in the bottom two for FAFSA completion rates over the prior three years. The colleges selected to participate in the pilot must employ outreach specialists to work with high schools in the educational service district with the purpose of increasing FAFSA and WASFA filing rates. SBCTC must report to the Legislature the outcomes of the pilot program beginning December 1, 2023.

State Library Outreach Pilot Program. Subject to appropriation, the State Library must administer a pilot program to distribute grants to local, public libraries to conduct community outreach to increase FAFSA and WASFA completion rates. The State Library must administer grants to public libraries located within educational service districts in the bottom two for FAFSA completion rates when combining their respective school districts' FAFSA completion rates over the past three academic years prior to the effective date of the act. The State Library must report the outcomes of the pilot program beginning December 1, 2023.

Washington College Grant Changes. The WCG is modified to allow a student to either demonstrate financial need by meeting the income requirements or by WSAC confirming the student's participation in one of the following state public assistance programs:

- Aged, Blind, or Disabled Assistance Benefits;
- Essential Needs and Housing Support;
- Pregnant Women Assistance; or
- Refugee Cash Assistance.

WSAC is required to enter into a data-sharing agreement with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to facilitate the sharing of individual level data for the purpose of confirming WCG income eligibility through a public assistance program. DSHS is permitted to release individual-level data of state-funded public assistance programs to WSAC for this purpose, unless prohibited by federal law.

WSAC is required to collaborate with DSHS to facilitate individual-level outreach to

individuals receiving benefits under the public assistance programs listed above, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the State Family Assistance Program, and the Basic Food Program in order to inform the individuals of their WCG eligibility.

WSAC must issue certificates for students in grades 10, 11, and 12 whose families are receiving benefits through one of the public assistance programs. This certificate validates the student's financial need eligibility for the WCG for one year after high school graduation upon enrollment in a higher education institution, provided the student meets the other WCG eligibility requirements. WSAC must maintain records of which high school students received certificates as the student does not need to present the certificate to receive the WCG.

Appropriation: The bill contains a null and void clause requiring specific funding be provided in an omnibus appropriation act.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Second Substitute House Bill (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Washington has a goal of 70 percent of high school graduates earning a postsecondary credential. The problem is not enough people are taking advantage of the states robust aid and going to college. This campaign to increase financial aid awareness is necessary. Efforts like these have proven successful elsewhere. What research shows us is that the paperwork hurdle of aid applications causes many students to stumble. Offering help in filling out that paperwork lessens that barrier. Allowing the state to use paperwork filed for other state assistance programs removes that barrier. Research from this in other states shows it can significantly increase enrollment. We support the efforts to increase awareness of the WCG program and efforts to increase college enrollment. We believe this bill will help increase college enrollment. With undergraduate enrollment dropping 7 percent, and thousands of students not filling out the FAFSA, we aren't going to make significant progress to the states attainment goal without changes. Incorporating WSACs grant program request in this legislation will help leverage local partners. Part of why I stayed in state for college was because of the amazing opportunities for financial aid. But, many of my peers are unaware of them. I didn't know about the WCG until I was awarded it. We have some successful FAFSA outreach programs in libraries throughout the state and we look forward to partnering with community organizations to do this work elsewhere. Having someone there to help walk a family through the financial aid paperwork will be helpful.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Bill Lyne, United Faculty of Washington State; Jacob Vigdor, University of Washington Faculty;

EDGAR ESPINO, Associated Students of Central Washington University (ASCWU); Anna Corinne Huffman, Associated Students of WWU; Shea Hamilton, Independent Colleges of Washington; Neil Strege, Washington Roundtable; Zackary Turner, Washington Student Association; Landis Hanson, WSA; Juliet Schindler, College Success Foundation; Jaelyn Sotelo, Washington Student Association; Carolyn Logue, Washington Library Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Second Substitute House Bill (Ways & Means): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.*

PRO: Having help with the FAFSA would have helped me more easily access financial aid. Washington under normal circumstances ranks very low in FAFSA completion and it's getting worse. That has big financial impacts for students. This bill is important in helping get resources to students. Many of the plans in this bill came from youth in Washington who are trying to access these services. This will help more students access funding to finish college.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Edgar Espino, Associated Students of Central Washington University, Washington Student Association; Zackary Turner, Washington Student Association; Tegan Sims; Mara Denmon-Bailey; Anna Corinne Huffman, Associated Students of Western Washington University; Evans Kaame, Communities for Our Colleges Coalition and Washington Student Association; Jaelyn Sotelo, Washington Student Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.