

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5215

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, January 28, 2021

Title: An act relating to increasing the maximum Washington college grant award at independent institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Increasing the maximum Washington college grant award at independent institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Senators Conway, Holy, Das, Nguyen, Nobles, Randall and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/21/21, 1/28/21 [DP-WM].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases the maximum Washington College Grant award for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions to be the equivalent of the maximum award at the public higher education institutions.

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.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

Background: 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.

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.

The WCG award amount varies based on the institution the student attends and the student's family income. For students attending the state's public institutions, the maximum award is tuition and services and activities fees for 15 quarter credit hours or the equivalent. For students attending private four-year not-for-profit higher education institutions, in 2019-20 the maximum award was \$9,739. The maximum award for students at private four-year not for-profit institutions may increase by no more than the tuition growth factor annually. An eligible student may receive a WCG for five years or up to 125 percent of the published length of the student's program. Part-time students receive prorated awards.

The tuition growth factor means an increase of no more than the average annual percentage growth rate of the median hourly wage for Washington for the previous 14 years as the wage is determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Summary of Bill: The maximum WCG award for students attending private four-year not for-profit institutions is modified to be the lesser of the maximum award at a public two or four-year higher education institutions or the individual institution's tuition for 15 quarter credits.

Appropriation: None.

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: PRO: The problem here is we used to have a linkage between our college grant programs and our independent colleges. When we passed the bill in 2019 we severed the linkage. This is an effort to close the gap between these great private independent colleges. This is a budget year and this is the time for us to have a conversation about closing this gap. It is unfair for students at one institution to get a higher award than those at our independent colleges. I count on the Washington college grant and other grants to pay for my tuition and expenses. This increase would reduce the amount of hours I have to work and the loans I have to take out. I'm attending Seattle Pacific University because it is close to home and I can help take care of my family. This bill would give me flexibility to help out my siblings while going to college. One in three Independent Colleges of Washington (ICW) students are black, indigenous, or students of color. The gap between the highest college grant award and our award is about \$1,300. This money would stretch the states higher education dollar and help our students. ICW colleges add valuable capacity to the higher education ecosystem in Washington and this aid would help increase degree attainment. Financial aid is the only reason I have been able to continue to attend my dream college. This bill will reduce the burden of student loans and give me flexibility to pursue my dreams. These private institutions are known for their

strong track records in student completion.

OTHER: We are generally in favor of expansion of the WCG. We do want to highlight how much further this investment can go in the public sector. The increase the in the award amount would be almost entirely washed out by the tuition increases at the private colleges in the last several years.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Steve Conway, Prime Sponsor; Christian Moreno, Whitman College; Sabrina Suminski, Whitman College; Terri Standish-Kuon, Independent Colleges of Washington; Bosena Telila, Seattle Pacific University; Ayren Daniels, Saint Martin's University; Enedeo Garza, Heritage University; Steve Smith, Black Education Strategy Roundtable.

OTHER: Zackary Turner, Washington Student Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.