

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5711

As of February 21, 2023

Title: An act relating to extending the terms of eligibility for the Washington college grant program.

Brief Description: Extending the terms of eligibility for the Washington college grant program.

Sponsors: Senators Nobles, Lias, Frame, Hasegawa, Hunt, Lovelett, Nguyen, Pedersen, Saldaña, Shewmake, Valdez and Wilson, C.; by request of Student Achievement Council.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/10/23, 2/17/23 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/21/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends eligibility for the Washington College Grant from five years or 125 percent of the published length of the student's program, to six years or 150 percent of the published length of the student's program.

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; Hawkins.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

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.

Staff: Michele Alishahi (786-7433)

Background: 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. An eligible student may receive a WCG for five years or up to 125 percent of the published length of the student's program.

Summary of Bill: A student is eligible to receive the WCG for six years or up to 150 percent of the published length of the student's program, or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

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 (Higher Education & Workforce Development):

PRO: Expanding access to higher education can bring greater economic opportunities, access to specialized professions, and tools to break the cycle of poverty. One tool to reduce the barrier to higher education is the Washington College Grant Program that provides students up to five years of financial aid for a four-year degree. This gives community members the freedom to pursue college degrees without the fear of debt. This bill would fix the gap between state and federal aid, so they have access to both for the same amount of time. This will reduce the burden on administrative offices and support students' ability to plan for college and ensure the state gets a better return on their investment, because students are more likely to complete a degree with this increased time frame. This bill will help students who face health struggles continue their education. Smaller course loads are often essential to the success of students who face barriers to their academics.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Senator T'wina Nobles, Prime Sponsor; Madeline Sprute, Associated Students of Tacoma Community College; Becky Thompson, Washington Student Achievement Council; Adán Mendoza-Sandoval, VP, WA Student Association; Jacob Katz, SBCTC; Yokiko Hayashi-Saguil, SBCTC; Savannah Eakin, ASWSU; Collin Bannister, ASWSU.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: This bill aligns the Washington College grant program with the Federal Pell grant program, allowing students more time to utilize state aid to complete their education. This is an investment in our state's economy because a large portion of students that graduate from public higher education institutions tend to stay in state, contributing to the economy, following their graduation. The extension of funding helps students finish their pathway to earn credentials, increasing graduation and retention rates at all public universities across the state. Due to a student's background, they may face more equity barriers in completing their education, so this grant ensures that these students don't get left behind and that they have the appropriate amount of time to access resources to complete their education.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Yokiko Hayashi-Saguil, SBCTC; Alex Davidson, The Associated Students of the University of Washington; Heather Hudson, Washington Student Achievement Council; Collin Bannister, ASWSU.

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