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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1559**

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**State of Washington**

**68th Legislature**

**2023 Regular Session**

**By** House Postsecondary Education & Workforce (originally sponsored by Representatives Entenman, Fitzgibbon, Stonier, Paul, Riccelli, Bergquist, Pollet, and Leavitt)

READ FIRST TIME 02/17/23.

1 AN ACT Relating to the student basic needs at public  
2 postsecondary institutions act; adding a new section to chapter  
3 28B.10 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28B.50 RCW; creating new  
4 sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** In 2022, students at 39 colleges and  
7 universities across Washington state participated in a survey about  
8 basic needs insecurities, including access to food, housing, child  
9 care, and more. The survey found that nearly half of all students in  
10 all regions of the state experienced some type of basic needs  
11 insecurity. One in every three students experienced either food  
12 insecurity or housing insecurity. One in every 10 students had also  
13 experienced homelessness in the previous 12 months. Some students  
14 experienced these insecurities at higher rates than others, and  
15 former foster youth had the highest rates of basic needs insecurities  
16 with 75 percent experiencing either food or housing insecurity.  
17 Addressing basic needs challenges for students contributes to their  
18 ability to remain enrolled and pursue their educational goals as  
19 evidenced by data from the two student support programs the  
20 legislature previously enacted, the student emergency assistance  
21 grant program and the supporting students experiencing homelessness

1 pilot program. When students received this assistance, an average of  
2 88 percent of them were able to persist in their programs.

3 Therefore, the legislature intends to continue to support  
4 students and help students meet their basic needs by increasing  
5 access to resources and support services.

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.10  
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 (1) By the 2023-24 academic year, an organization representing  
9 the presidents of the public four-year institutions of higher  
10 education shall establish a student basic needs task force comprised  
11 of staff and faculty, student representatives, and community  
12 organizations with expertise in accessing basic needs. The task force  
13 shall develop a hunger-free and basic needs campus strategic plan for  
14 each public four-year institution of higher education and tribal  
15 college beginning no later than April 1, 2024, and every year  
16 thereafter. Each strategic plan must:

17 (a) By the beginning of the 2024-25 academic year and every year  
18 thereafter, collect and disseminate results of a student survey  
19 developed by the student achievement council, in collaboration with  
20 the state board for community and technical colleges and an  
21 organization representing the presidents of the public four-year  
22 institutions of higher education, to assess food security, housing  
23 security, and access to basic economic supports that may be used by  
24 the institutions of higher education and the tribal colleges.  
25 Existing survey tool or tools may be used for this purpose;

26 (b) Be inclusive of, but is not limited to, both undergraduate  
27 and graduate students;

28 (c) If none exists, design a benefits resource hub to assist  
29 students with accessing public benefits, emergency financial  
30 assistance such as those created under RCW 28B.50.295, and other  
31 community resources utilizing one or more benefits navigators;

32 (d) Subject to appropriations, require each public four-year  
33 institution and the tribal college have a minimum of one full-time  
34 benefits navigator to assist students in accessing public benefits  
35 and existing emergency assistance programs such as those funded by  
36 RCW 28B.50.295;

37 (e) Identify campus food pantry policies that, in practice,  
38 create barriers to access and reduce or remove those barriers in the  
39 implementation of this subsection;

1 (f) Review and update methods to identify likely low-income and  
2 food-insecure students and conduct communications and outreach  
3 methods by the institution to promote opportunities for benefits  
4 assistance (such as basic food enrollment, working connections child  
5 care enrollment, referrals to the special supplemental nutrition  
6 program for women, infants, and children, affordable housing  
7 assistance) and emergency financial resources;

8 (g) Assess the needs and advantages of their benefits navigator  
9 model;

10 (h) Identify opportunities for the institution and partnerships  
11 with community-based organizations to holistically support students'  
12 basic needs, access to benefits and community resources;

13 (i) Identify how many full-time benefits navigators are necessary  
14 to adequately assist the institution's student population;

15 (j) Facilitate discussions and generate recommendations amongst  
16 community stakeholders on the basic needs of the institution's  
17 geographic postsecondary student population; and

18 (k) Assess the distribution of state funds for basic needs  
19 support provided to institutions of higher education and tribal  
20 colleges.

21 (2) Each strategic plan must include at least two proposed  
22 activities to implement, based on data collected in the surveys.

23 (3) Institutions of higher education and tribal colleges shall  
24 coordinate with an organization representing the presidents of the  
25 public four-year institutions to submit a report that must include  
26 the findings and activities from their respective strategic plans,  
27 and provide recommendations regarding strategies to address student  
28 basic needs. The organization representing the presidents of the  
29 public four-year institutions must submit the report by December 1,  
30 2025, and every other year thereafter, to the appropriate committees  
31 of the legislature in accordance with RCW 43.01.036.

32 (4) The student achievement council shall provide technical  
33 assistance to the task force developed under this section.

34 (5) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this  
35 section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

36 (a) "Benefits navigator" means an individual who is employed by  
37 an institution of higher education for the purpose of helping  
38 students seek, apply for, and receive assistance from benefits  
39 programs, emergency resources, and community resources.

1 (b) "Benefits resource hub" means a single location on campus  
2 where students are directed to get assistance from a benefits  
3 navigator to understand what basic needs benefits they may be  
4 eligible for and receive assistance in applications, enrollment, and  
5 removing barriers to receive support services.

6 (c) "Institutions of higher education" means institutions as  
7 defined in RCW 28B.10.016 and university campuses created under  
8 chapter 28B.45 RCW.

9 (d) "Student basic needs" means food, water, shelter, clothing,  
10 physical health, mental health, child care, or similar needs that  
11 students enrolled at an institution of higher education or tribal  
12 college may face difficulty with and that hinders their ability to  
13 begin or continue their enrollment.

14 (e) "Tribal colleges" means institutions of higher education  
15 operated by an Indian tribe as defined in RCW 43.376.010.

16 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.50  
17 RCW to read as follows:

18 (1) By the 2023-24 academic year, the college board shall  
19 establish a student basic needs task force comprised of staff and  
20 faculty, student representatives, and community organizations with  
21 expertise in accessing basic needs. The task force shall develop a  
22 hunger-free and basic needs strategic plan for community and  
23 technical college districts beginning no later than April 1, 2024,  
24 and every other year thereafter. The strategic plan must:

25 (a) By the beginning of the 2024-25 academic year and every year  
26 thereafter, collect and disseminate results of the student survey  
27 created under section 2(1)(a) of this act;

28 (b) If none exists, design benefits resource hubs at college  
29 districts selected by the college board, to assist students with  
30 accessing public benefits, emergency financial assistance such as  
31 those created under RCW 28B.50.295, and other community resources  
32 utilizing one or more benefits navigators;

33 (c) Subject to appropriations, hire full-time benefits navigators  
34 to assist students in accessing public benefits and existing  
35 emergency assistance programs such as those funded by RCW 28B.50.295;

36 (d) Identify campus food pantry policies that, in practice,  
37 create barriers to access, and reduce or remove those barriers in the  
38 implementation of this subsection;

1 (e) Review and update methods to identify likely low-income and  
2 food-insecure students and conduct communications and outreach  
3 methods to promote opportunities for benefits assistance (such as  
4 basic food enrollment, working connections child care enrollment,  
5 referrals to the special supplemental nutrition program for women,  
6 infants, and children, affordable housing assistance) and emergency  
7 financial resources;

8 (f) Assess the needs and advantages of the college board benefits  
9 navigator model;

10 (g) Identify opportunities for the college board to partner with  
11 community-based organizations to holistically support students' basic  
12 needs, access to benefits, and community resources;

13 (h) Identify how many full-time benefits navigators are necessary  
14 to adequately assist the student population of the college districts  
15 selected in (b) of this subsection;

16 (i) Facilitate discussions and generate recommendations amongst  
17 community stakeholders on the basic needs of the college districts'  
18 geographic student population; and

19 (j) Assess the distribution of state funds for basic needs  
20 support provided to college districts.

21 (2) The strategic plan must include at least two proposed  
22 activities to implement based on data collected from the student  
23 survey.

24 (3) The college board shall design and implement a benefits  
25 navigator grant program to provide funding for benefits navigators as  
26 established in subsection (1)(c) of this section. The college board  
27 shall review applications for the benefits navigator grant program  
28 and select college districts to receive the grant.

29 (4) College districts shall coordinate with the college board to  
30 submit a report that must include the findings and activities from  
31 the strategic plan and provide recommendations regarding strategies  
32 to address student basic needs. The college board must submit the  
33 report by December 1, 2025, and every other year thereafter, to the  
34 appropriate committees of the legislature in accordance with RCW  
35 43.01.036.

36 (5) The student achievement council shall provide technical  
37 assistance to the task force developed under this section.

38 (6) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this  
39 section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

1 (a) "Benefits navigator" means an individual who is employed by  
2 an institution of higher education for the purpose of helping  
3 students seek, apply for, and receive assistance from benefits  
4 programs, emergency resources, and community resources.

5 (b) "Benefits resource hub" means a single location on campus  
6 where students are directed to get assistance from a benefits  
7 navigator to understand what basic needs benefits they may be  
8 eligible for and receive assistance in applications, enrollment, and  
9 removing barriers to receive support services.

10 (c) "Student basic needs" means food, water, shelter, clothing,  
11 physical health, mental health, child care, or similar needs that  
12 students enrolled at a college district may face difficulty with and  
13 that hinders their ability to begin or continue their enrollment.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) Subject to the availability of amounts  
15 appropriated for this specific purpose, a pilot program to provide  
16 free and low-cost meal plans or food vouchers to eligible low-income  
17 students is established at:

18 (a) Four college districts, two on each side of the crest of the  
19 Cascade mountains, selected by the state board for community and  
20 technical colleges; and

21 (b) Two public four-year institutions of higher education, one on  
22 each side of the crest of the Cascade mountains, selected by an  
23 organization representing the presidents of public four-year  
24 institutions.

25 (2) The pilot program expires July 1, 2026.

26 (3) This section expires January 1, 2027.

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