
Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

HB 1657

Brief Description: Establishing the Washington 13 free guarantee.

Sponsors: Representatives Bergquist, Barkis, Reed, Pollet, Doglio and Simmons.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Washington 13 Free Guarantee providing up to 45 credits of tuition-free technical college for eligible students regardless of income.
- Adds student notifications about financial aid options.

Hearing Date: 2/5/25

Staff: Saranda Ross (786-7068).

Background:

Office of Student Financial Assistance.

The Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) operates within the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). The Office administers state and federal financial aid and other education service programs.

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 the purpose of 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

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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 WSAC.

College Bound Scholarship.

The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) provides recipients who attend two-year or four-year public institutions of higher education an award to cover the cost of tuition and fees, minus any state-funded grant, scholarship, or waiver assistance. Recipients attending public institutions also receive \$500 for books and materials. The CBS awards for recipients at private institutions may be covered at public tuition rates.

Washington College Grant.

The Washington College Grant (WCG) is the state's largest financial aid program and provides grants to low-income students to pursue postsecondary education. The WCG is an entitlement program administered by the WSAC with guaranteed grants for students who qualify.

State Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Initiative Pilot Program.

Outreach Specialists under the State Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Initiative Pilot Program work directly with high school students and their families to increase FAFSA and WASFA completion rates and provide information on how to access private scholarships.

High School and Beyond Plan.

Each high school student must complete a High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). The purpose of the HSBP is to guide the student's high school experience and inform course taking that is aligned with the student's goals for education or training and career after high school. School districts are encouraged to involve parents and guardians in the process of developing and updating the HSBP, and the HSBP must be provided to the students' parents or guardians in their native language if that language is one of the two most frequently spoken non-English languages of students in the district.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington 13 Free Guarantee (Guarantee) is established to provide up to 45 credits of tuition-free technical college for eligible students regardless of income beginning in the 2027-28 academic year.

Awards under the Guarantee are the difference between a recipient's tuition and services and activities fees, less the value of any state-funded grant, scholarship, gift aid, and waiver assistance for up to 45 credits to be earned within two academic years. Additionally, each technical college must designate a staff member to provide support and coordinate wraparound services for recipients to reduce or help to reduce barriers that threaten completion of eligible degree or certificate programs.

To be eligible, resident students must meet the following requirements:

- have graduated from a public high school in the state or earned a high school equivalency certificate;
- within the same or immediately preceding academic year from graduating high school or earning a high school equivalency certificate, enroll in an eligible degree or certificate program at least part time at a technical college;
- not have previously earned an associate's degree;
- complete the FAFSA or the WASFA for the academic year in which the student seeks eligibility for the Guarantee; and
- maintain satisfactory academic progress as determined by the Office.

Eligible degree or certificate programs include professional and technical programs that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential and apprenticeship programs conducted in association with any community or technical college.

Counselors at public school districts are encouraged to meet with twelfth grade students whose income status is at or below 70 percent of the state median family income to review award options under the Washington College Grant and the Guarantee. Income status may be determined by the FAFSA, qualification to receive free or reduced-price lunch, eligibility for the College Bound Scholarship, or other criteria established in an institution's policy.

Information about the Guarantee must be included in the annual notification of financial aid opportunities provided to parents and guardians of students in the twelfth grade. The Outreach Specialists under the State Financial Aid Outreach and Completion Initiative Pilot Program must provide eligible seniors information on award options under the Guarantee. Notices to students required under the HSBP must include information on the Guarantee, the College Bound Scholarship, the WCG, and other scholarship opportunities beginning in the ninth grade and each year thereafter.

In implementing and administering the Guarantee, the Office is authorized to establish rules.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 28, 2025.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.