

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5275

As of January 23, 2025

Title: An act relating to modifying funding and award levels for the passport to careers program, and permitting students eligible for the passport to careers program to automatically qualify as income-eligible for the purpose of receiving the Washington college grant.

Brief Description: Modifying funding and award levels for the passport to careers program and eligibility for the Washington college grant.

Sponsors: Senators Nobles, Slatter, Hasegawa, Liias, Saldaña, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/23/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Legislature to appropriate funding to the Passport to Careers Program, with all eligible students being entitled to an award in the 2025-26 academic year.
- Modifies the award amount to \$5,000 annually, not to exceed the student's financial need.
- Makes eligible participants categorically eligible for the Washington College Grant.
- Directs the Caseload Forecast Council to estimate the anticipated caseload of the Passport to Careers Program.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Benjamin Omdal (786-7442)

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.

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 six years or up to 150 percent of the published length of the student's program.

Passport to Careers. The Passport to Careers Program is comprised of the Passport to College and Passport to Apprenticeship Grant Programs. These programs serve former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth. An individual is eligible for a maximum of six years or up to 150 percent of the published length of the student's program.

The total award an individual may receive must not exceed the equivalent amount that would have been awarded for the individual to attend a public university for six years with the highest annual tuition and state-mandated fees.

Caseload Forecast Council. The Caseload Forecast Council is charged with forecasting the entitlement caseloads, and other caseloads, for the state of Washington. The Caseload Forecast Council meets several times a year to adopt official forecasts that are the basis of the Governor's budget document and used by the Legislature in the development of the Omnibus Biennial Appropriations Act.

Summary of Bill: Beginning in the 2025-26 academic year, all eligible students are entitled to a Passport to Careers award. The Legislature must appropriate funding for the program on the basis of estimated eligible participants enrolled in eligible institutions of higher education or apprenticeship programs.

A Passport to College scholarship is modified to \$5,000 annually beginning in the 2025-26 academic year and may increase annually by the tuition growth factor, not to exceed the student's financial need.

Eligibility for the Passport to Careers program is added to the list of ways to be eligible for the WCG.

The Caseload Forecast Council shall estimate the anticipated caseload of the Passport to Careers Program and submit the caseload forecast to the Governor and members of the legislative fiscal committees.

The Office of Student Financial Assistance must deposit money received for the Passport to Careers Program into the State Financial Aid Account in the custody of the state treasurer.

Appropriation: The bill contains an appropriation from various accounts.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2025.

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: Washington has made significant strides in providing access to higher education and career training. This bill increases funding to expand program funding and simplifying eligibility requirements to the Washington College Grant. This bill strengthens the program's ability to serve students thereby reducing barriers. The Passport to Careers program is a huge vital resources for the students that receive the award. The program provides direct support to many students, giving them a chance to succeed and graduate. The bill should go even further to protect this vulnerable group of students. The scholarship provides central support beyond tuition, including housing and supplies. The award does not meet all student needs, but helps student retention. The Passport program has given people hope that they can break the cycle of poverty, but the reduction in the award has made things more difficult for award recipients. The scholarship has been essential in helping students stay focused and navigating the college system, while also helping with housing stability and other areas. Making the program an entitlement will give these students support they can count on. The bill is an intentional opportunity to invest in the folks who support his work.

OTHER: The Passport scholarship does not solve every challenge these students face but plays a crucial role in their retention. Reductions in prior years had a significant negative impact.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator T'wina Nobles, Prime Sponsor; Maria Belen Sepulveda, n/a; Mykhail Lembke, University of Washington Graduate & Professional Student Senate; Isela Bonilla, Legislative Liaison ASWSU Vancouver; Trevor Spane, Passport to Change; Yokiko Hayashi-Saguil, College Success Foundation; Jacob Vigdor, UW Faculty/Council of Faculty; Olive Salas.

OTHER: cierra Draper-West, University of Washington Champions Program.

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