SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5923

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Higher Education, March 4, 1997

Title: An act relating to expanding eligibility for the educational opportunity grant program.

Brief Description: Expanding eligibility for the educational opportunity grant program.

Sponsors: Senators West and Kohl.

Brief History:
   Committee Activity: Higher Education: 3/3/97, 3/4/97 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.
   Signed by Senators Wood, Chair; Winsley, Vice Chair; Bauer, Hale, Kohl, Patterson, Prince, Sheldon and West.

Staff: Jean Six (786-7423)

Background: The Educational Opportunity Grant (EOG) program was created in 1990 as part of the branch campus legislation, at the request of the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB). The program was intended to test the premise that student financial aid policy could be used to influence student choice of institutions. The Board's recommendation that the program be created was based on an assumption that the size and, therefore, the construction and operating costs of the proposed branch campuses could be reduced if students who were placebound could be encouraged to enroll in existing colleges and universities (both public and independent) and utilize what would otherwise be unused capacity.

The program provides $2,500 grants to placebound residents of branch campus service areas. The grant is for upper-division baccalaureate work only; recipients must have completed an associate of arts degree or achieved at least junior standing. Additionally, students must be Washington residents, have demonstrated financial need, and may not pursue degrees in religious studies. Recipients may attend any four-year public or private baccalaureate institution that has existing unused capacity, except a branch campus.

In 1994, the Board conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the program and found that: the program's relatively small size had marginalized its effects on facility planning; the program has a positive effect on the state's efforts to enhance upper-division higher education access and success; the program is most effective as an inducement for placebound students to attend local schools (particulary private schools), and is least effective as an incentive for students to relocate; and EOG recipients are older, female, independent, single and parents, and more likely to be minority students. The evaluation also recommended the conversion

of the program from a demonstration effort to one that is permanent. The Board, however, recommended continuation of the program as currently enacted.

In 1996, Thurston County was added to the previous 13 counties of residence that serve as one of the eligibility criteria for applicants. In the 1997 biennium, funding for the program doubled from $500,000 to $1 million. Recipients continue to match the profile from previous years, including the 422 recipients for 1996-97.

Summary of Bill: The Educational Opportunity Grant is a permanent program to assist financially needy placebound upper division students to attend any public or independent baccalaureate institution in the state of Washington that is accredited by an accrediting association approved by the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Financial aid should follow the student and provide student choice. It is important that students in branch campus areas have access to the financial aid and be able to attend the local branch campus.

Testimony Against: The EOG was expected to slow down capital development of public institutions and ought to continue encouraging students to attend independent colleges. There are 2,000 available enrollment slots in the independents and state financial aid will encourage students to enroll in the independent sector.

Testified: Terry Teale, COP (pro); Tom Parker, WA Friends (con).