

SENATE BILL REPORT

2E3SSB 5598

As Passed Senate, February 10, 2000

Title: An act relating to higher education scholarships.

Brief Description: Creating the Washington's promise scholarship program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators McAuliffe, Finkbeiner, West, Jacobsen, Long, Kline, Costa, Snyder, Eide, Patterson, Hale and Winsley; by request of Governor Locke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/12/99, 3/3/99 [DPS-WM, DNPS]; 1/21/00, 1/26/00 [DP3S, DNP].

Ways & Means: 3/5/99, 3/8/99 [DP2S, DNPS]; 1/31/00 [DP3S (HIE)].

Passed Senate, 3/11/99, 45-0; 2/10/00, 46-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: That Third Substitute Senate Bill No. 5598 be substituted therefor, and the third substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Kohl-Welles, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Bauer, Jacobsen, McAuliffe and B. Sheldon.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Horn and Sheahan.

Staff: Jean Six (786-7423)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Third Substitute Senate Bill No. 5598 as recommended by Committee on Higher Education be substituted therefor, and the third substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Loveland, Chair; Brown, Vice Chair; Fraser, Honeyford, Kline, Kohl-Welles, Long, Rasmussen, Roach, B. Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel, Thibaudeau, Winsley and Wojahn.

Staff: Karen Barrett (786-7711)

Background: The 1999-01 biennial budget created the Promise Scholarship for two years and provided the funding to award two-year scholarships to high school seniors in the top 10 percent of their school class in 1999 and the top 15 percent of their school class in 2000 and whose families earn no more than 135 percent of the state's median family income. Within available funds, the Higher Education Coordinating Board determined the award

amounts in order to serve the greatest number of eligible students. The intent was to award grants of up to two years of community college tuition.

The number of eligible students exceeded the estimates so the first year grants were less than the full resident community college tuition level. Recipients of the Promise Scholarships used the awards to attend many of the public and private colleges and universities in Washington.

Unless the scholarship program is established in law or included in the 2001-03 budget and provided funding, it will end on June 30, 2001.

Summary of Bill: The focus of the Promise Scholarship is on middle and low-income families. To be eligible for the scholarship, the academically qualified student must be in a family earning up to 135 percent of the state median family income. Students who qualify for the scholarship may also qualify for the state need grant and federal Pell grants.

Academic criteria that apply prior to the certificate of mastery require students to be in the top 15 percent of their graduating class from a public or approved private high school in 2001 and 2002. Beginning with the graduating class of 2003, students must pass all components of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) on the first attempt in the 9th grade or be in the top 15 percent of their graduating class. Home schooled students must pass the WASL on their first attempt when they take it in the 10th grade. All students have the additional option of earning a cumulative Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) score of 1200 on their first attempt. After the certificate of mastery is required, eligible students must pass all parts of the certificate of mastery.

The state need grant is given funding priority. Priority is defined as being able to make need grants to qualified students applying with income at or below 65 percent of the state median based on household size. The Promise Scholarship shall not supplant grants for the state's neediest students.

Students may use the Promise Scholarship for undergraduate work at any of the state's public or private higher education institutions. The scholarship must be used within six years of its being awarded.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 15, 2000.

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

Testimony For: Offering this scholarship to hard-working, academically successful students provides an opportunity for needy students to attend college who otherwise not be able to attend. There is a great overlap of students who are eligible for the State Need Grant (SNG) who also earn the Promise Scholarship. The program has been well-received and it is important to put the program into statute. While the COP and the Washington Student Lobby (WSL) had reservations about the bill last session, COP and the students will now support the bill because the SNG is protected.

Home schoolers are concerned about a requirement for passing the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Are there other tests or avenues available for the home schooled student?

This scholarship begins to address the needs of the meritorious students in the middle. The connection between K-12 reform and higher education is appreciated.

Once the Certificate of Mastery is in place, the top 15 percent standard ought to be removed. Some recommend that the students ought to be allowed a second attempt to pass the WASL. The 10 year time span for using the award is too long. Be careful about the fit between the Certificate of Mastery and the Promise Scholarship.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Terry Teale, Executive Director, Council of Presidents (COP); Bruce Botka, Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB); Carolyn Busch, Governor's Office; Senator Rosemary McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Tom Parker, Washington Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU); Renee Visich, UW, Washington Student Lobby (WSL); Jan Klein, home school parent; Rainer Houser, Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP); Mike Boring, Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA).