

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5670

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As of April 3, 2013

**Title:** An act relating to extending state need grant eligibility under certain circumstances.

**Brief Description:** Extending state need grant eligibility under certain circumstances.

**Sponsors:** Senators Ranker, Kohl-Welles, Hasegawa and Keiser.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education: 2/19/13.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Staff:** Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

**Background:** The State Need Grant (SNG) program assists needy and disadvantaged students by offsetting a portion of their higher education costs. To be eligible, a student's family income cannot exceed 70 percent of the state's median family income, currently \$57,500 yearly for a family of four.

Under current law, a student is eligible to receive a SNG award for up to five years, or up to 125 percent of the published length of time of the student's program. Under rule, the total SNG award must be reduced for less than full-time enrollment: 75 percent for students taking nine to eleven credits, 50 percent for students taking six to eight credits, and 25 percent for students taking three to five credits.

Under the SNG Policy Manual, published by the Office of Financial Assistance, within the Student Achievement Council, financial aid administrators may exercise professional judgment to individual student situations when applying the 125 percent rule. While the actual 125 percent limit cannot be changed, other circumstances can be recognized and documented in the student's file. For example, the school may do one of the following:

- choose the unit of measure that constitutes the published length of time;
- exclude remedial coursework up to 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours;
- exclude English as a Second Language course work;
- re-start the timeframe after a change of program; or
- consider other exceptional circumstances as documented by the student.

**Summary of Bill:** The bill as referred to committee not considered.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Summary of Bill (Proposed First Substitute):** While the Legislature finds that, in most circumstances, SNG eligibility should not extend beyond five years or 125 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled, the Legislature also finds that students should not lose SNG eligibility for taking credits beyond 125 percent of the published length of their program when they were unable to enroll in the classes they needed to complete their program as a result of waitlists and course closures.

When determining whether an individual student has met 125 percent of the published length of time of the student's program, an institutional aid administrator must exempt the following:

- courses that were taken to replace waitlisted or closed courses necessary for the student program over 15 semester hours or the equivalent quarter hours;
- remedial coursework up to 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours;
- courses for English Language Learners;
- courses taken before a one-time change in programs; and
- other exceptional circumstances as documented by the student.

The exemption must take place at least one month before the start of a semester or quarter.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: This bill is a direct response to student stories. Four years used to be the standard to graduate, but students are taking longer to get a degree because they need to work more to cover tuition and universities have reduced class offerings. Students may need to take a class outside their program to meet minimum SNG requirements, but then they max out on the 125 percent requirement. The fifth year is the most burdensome year with the most difficult courses and it is when financial aid is needed most.

OTHER: Focus on funding currently eligible students before we add policy changes. It would be a burdensome task by aid administrators to figure all of this out. One alternative is to align SNG with Pell Grant requirements, which is 150 percent of the student's program, and would eliminate the need for the bill. We are not sure there is an issue on campuses and have not seen evidence that SNG eligibility is adversely affected to warrant new legislation. It would be best to wait for the December report on SNG from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Ben Crowther, WA Student Assn.

OTHER: Scott Copeland, State Board for Community & Technical Colleges; Jane Wall, The Council of Presidents.