

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1236

As Passed House:
March 4, 2015

Title: An act relating to eliminating the parent or guardian approval requirement for the college bound scholarship pledge.

Brief Description: Concerning witnessing a student's college bound scholarship pledge when efforts to obtain a parent's or guardian's signature are unsuccessful.

Sponsors: House Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Ortiz-Self, Johnson, Santos, Lytton, Moscoso, Pettigrew, Walkinshaw, Kilduff, Sawyer, Reykdal, Bergquist, Fey, Tarleton and Hudgins).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/21/15, 2/3/15, 2/4/15 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/4/15, 74-24.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Adds that a student's parents or guardians, in addition to the student, must be notified of the student's eligibility for the College Bound Scholarship Program and the requirements for award of the scholarship.
- Requires the Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) to make multiple attempts, including partnering with a school counselor or administrator, to secure a signature from a student's parent or guardian for the College Bound Scholarship pledge.
- Allows a school counselor or administrator to witness the pledge instead if efforts to contact a student's parent or guardian have been unsuccessful and the nature of those efforts are indicated to the OSFA.
- Corrects Higher Education Coordinating Board references to the Office of Student Financial Services references.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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.

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Gregory, Reykdal, Sells, Stambaugh and Tarleton.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Hargrove, Holy and Van Werven.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

The Office of Student Financial Assistance.

On July 1, 2012, the Higher Education Coordinating Board was abolished and the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) was created in its place. The Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) within the WSAC is in charge of administering the College Bound Scholarship (CBS) Program, which includes developing and distributing pledge forms, implementing the application and selection process, and tracking scholarship recipients. The Office also purchases tuition units under the Advanced College Tuition Payment Program, also known as the Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET) Program, for the purpose of the CBS awards. The Office distributes scholarship funds to the institutions of higher education on behalf of the recipients.

College Bound Scholarship Program.

The CBS Program was established in 2007 to provide guaranteed four-year tuition to students from low-income families. The first CBS awards were granted to the graduating high school class of 2012.

Eligible students for the CBS include those who:

- qualify for free or reduced-price lunches in the seventh grade; or
- are dependent from parents or guardians, or are receiving extended foster care services; and
- in grades seven through 12; or
- are between the ages of 18 and 21 and have not graduated from high school.

Beginning in the seventh grade, eligible students are notified of their eligibility and the requirements for award of the scholarship. To be eligible to receive the CBS, a student must sign a pledge during the seventh or eighth grade that includes a commitment to graduate from high school with at least a C average and with no felony convictions. The pledge must be witnessed by a parent or guardian and forwarded to the Office. If the student is a dependent, the student is automatically enrolled without any action necessary by the student or the student's family.

To receive the CBS, the student must graduate with at least a C average from a public high school, approved private high school, or have received home-based instruction. The student cannot have a felony conviction and must be a resident student. Upon graduation, the student's family income will be assessed, and if it does not exceed 65 percent of the state median family income, the student will receive a scholarship.

The CBS recipients that attend public two-year or four-year institutions of higher education receive an award to cover the cost of tuition and fees, minus any state-funded grant, scholarship, or waiver assistance, plus \$500 for books and materials. The student must maintain satisfactory academic progress and may not receive the scholarship for more than four full-time years.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:

An eligible student must sign the pledge during the seventh or eighth grade and have it witnessed by a parent or guardian. The Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) must make multiple attempts to secure the signature of the student's parent or guardian for the purpose of witnessing the pledge. If the OSFA is unsuccessful in obtaining the signature, the OSFA may partner with the student's school counselor or administrator to secure the parent's or guardian's signature. If the signature is still not obtained, then the student's school counselor or administrator may witness the pledge instead and indicate to the OSFA the nature of the unsuccessful efforts to contact the student's parent or guardian.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Counselors repeatedly report how the parent signature that is currently needed for the College Bound Scholarship (CBS) pledge is a barrier to students who need the money the most. There are numerous reasons why parents do not sign the pledge, such as language barriers, homelessness, or fear of signing it because of income verification. This is a struggle for the Latino population. Students who need the scholarship the most are not getting signatures and after numerous attempts, the student eventually no longer qualifies. The student should not be punished for the fault of the parent's unresponsiveness.

The signature serves two purposes. First, to inform the parent about the scholarship. This helps keep graduation rates up, and the school districts support keeping the parents notified. Parent involvement usually declines in middle school, and it is critical to student success. Even though the signature provides an opportunity for parental engagement, there are other ways to involve families. Second, the signature verifies income; however, the parent's signature does not give the school any more information than they already have. It does provide informed consent to release information, but this is a gray area. Any additional details that need to be worked out will get figured out. The scholarship could be better served if the barrier is eliminated.

(Opposed) None.

(Information Only) The CBS is modeled after a program in Indiana where tax returns are collected, parents self-certify, and the family income is verified at the time of college enrollment. Eighty-nine percent of last year's eighth grade cohort signed up. The 11 percent who did not participate is about 4,000 students. Multiple missing information letters are sent out. In addition, counselors are contacted for the student's last known school. Many students move around a lot, but they can be monitored, tracked, and supported. The pledge form leads to conversations around the dinner table and to family engagement. Instead of being worried about the cost of tuition, families worry about how to prepare for college. There are different methods other than the parent signature to keep parents engaged in the process.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Ortiz-Self, prime sponsor; Amy Brackenbury, Washington School Councilors Association; Wendy Rader-Konofalski; and Uriel Iniguez, Hispanic Commission.

(Information only) Rachelle Sharpe, Washington Student Achievement Council.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.