

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1893

As Reported by House Committee On: College & Workforce Development

Title: An act relating to providing assistance for postsecondary students, such as access to food or transportation, to help those students remain enrolled.

Brief Description: Providing assistance for certain postsecondary students.

Sponsors: Representatives Entenman, Leavitt, Pollet, Paul, Stanford and Valdez.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 2/13/19, 2/20/19 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a grant program for community and technical colleges (CTCs) to provide monetary assistance to students experiencing unforeseen emergencies or situations.
- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to identify educational programs at the CTCs that would meet the requirements of state-approved employment and training programs, for purposes of CTC students being eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Requires the DSHS to request waivers from federal SNAP regulations to allow institutions of higher education to accept SNAP benefits on campus and allow students who are eligible for the State Need Grant to be eligible for SNAP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Bergquist, Mead, Paul, Pollet, Ramos, Sells and Slatter.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Van Werven, Ranking Minority Member; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kraft and Young.

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.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Graham, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Rude and Sutherland.

Staff: Trudes Tango (786-7384).

Background:

Financial Assistance to Community and Technical College Students.

Each institution of higher education must deposit a minimum of 3.5 percent of revenues collected from tuition and services and activities fees in an institutional financial aid fund. Moneys in the fund must be used to make long-term and short-term loans to certain eligible students and to provide financial aid to needy students. A "needy student" means a student who demonstrates an inability to meet the total cost of room, board, books, tuition, and fees for any semester or quarter. Most community and technical colleges (CTCs) offer grants to needy students using moneys from their funds. Students are required to fill out an application and moneys are used on a first come, first serve basis.

Most CTCs also have food pantries, with each college having their own criteria for how students access food pantries. Other aid at CTCs include the Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET) program, which is funded by federal dollars and administered by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The BFET program provides employability assessments and services to certain Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. In addition to job training services, the BFET benefits can include emergency aid for child care, transportation, or other needs related to job seeking and employability.

Basic Food Program.

The SNAP program, which is called Basic Food in Washington and is administered by the DSHS, provides nutritional support benefits to low-income individuals and families. Generally, a person must be at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level to be eligible for benefits. Congress authorizes funding and establishes SNAP requirements.

For a student of higher education to receive Basic Food, the student must meet certain income thresholds and meet other conditions mandated by federal law. One condition that allows a student to receive Basic Food is if the student is in "an approved state or local employment and training program," which must meet federal criteria.

Recipients of SNAP access their benefits using the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which operates like a debit card and may only be used at retail stores that have been approved by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In general, a retail store may be eligible to accept SNAP benefits if it sells food for home preparation and meets other federal criteria, such as having more than 50 percent of the total dollar amount of all retail sales be from the sale of eligible staple foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, vegetables, fruits, bread). In general, a person may not use SNAP benefits to purchase foods sold hot at the point-of-sale.

A state may apply to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service for a waiver of the federal SNAP rules.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Grant Program for Community and Technical Colleges.

The Emergency Assistance Grant program, administered by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), is established for the CTCs to provide monetary assistance to students experiencing unforeseen emergencies or situations that affect the student's ability to attend classes.

The CTCs applying for the grant must demonstrate need, which may include showing demographic data on student income levels, students experiencing homelessness or food insecurity, and other factors. The CTC applicants must also: (1) ensure that students' access to emergency aid funds will be as low barrier as possible; (2) allow flexibility in who may apply for funds and include students who may not necessarily meet the definition of "needy student" but who may be experiencing emergency situations; (3) and indicate how the CTC will prioritize the disbursement of emergency aid funds. The CTC may not require a student to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid in order to receive emergency aid, but the CTC must require students request assistance in writing.

The CTC must use grant funds to provide monetary aid to students to assist them in, for example, purchasing food, and paying for transportation, child care, or other goods or services needed in order for the student to continue attending classes.

In selecting grant recipients, the SBCTC must consider a CTC's demonstration of need and the resources and programs already in existence at the college. The SBCTC must begin accepting applications for the grant by December 1, 2019, and must submit annual reports to the Legislature by December 1, 2020.

Request for Waivers for Basic Food.

The DSHS must request from the USDA waivers from federal regulations on SNAP to:

- allow institutions of higher education to accept SNAP benefits in the form of EBT cards at on-campus food retail establishments; and
- allow postsecondary students who are eligible for the State Need Grant to be eligible for SNAP.

The DSHS, in consultation with the SBCTC, must also identify educational programs at the CTCs that would meet the requirements of state-approved employment and training programs, for purposes of CTC students being eligible for SNAP.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute removes the provision stating colleges may not require an application process for students seeking emergency aid, and instead provides that colleges cannot require students to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid for emergency aid, but colleges must require students request assistance in writing.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Many four-year institutions of higher education have foundations that can help students in emergency situations, but CTCs generally do not have similar foundations. Some students have one-time emergency situations that could result in the student not being able to attend school. The goal of this bill is to keep students in school. Many students qualify for state benefits and they should be able to use those benefits on campus. Food assistance is critical in student success. The biggest waste of state funds is to have a student accumulate credits but then never finish. There are community resources that can collaborate with campuses.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Entenman, prime sponsor; Marc Webster, Washington Student Achievement Council; Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline; Annie Landis, The Evergreen State College; Erin Frasier, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; and Joe Gruber, University District Food Bank.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.