

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 1893

As of March 22, 2019

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: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Entenman, Leavitt, Pollet, Paul, Stanford and Valdez).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/06/19, 56-40.

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 3/19/19.

Brief Summary of 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 the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Requires DSHS to request waivers from federal SNAP regulations to allow higher education institutions to accept SNAP benefits on campus and allow students who are eligible for the State Need Grant to be eligible for SNAP.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Staff: Kellee Gunn (786-7429)

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, services, and activities fees in an institutional financial aid fund. Monies in the

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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 CTCs offer grants to needy students using monies from their funds. Students are required to fill out an application and monies are used on a first come, first served basis.

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

Basic Food Program. SNAP, which is called Basic Food in Washington, and is administered by 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 higher education student to receive Basic Food benefits, 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 benefits 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 an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which operates like a debit card and may only be used at retail stores 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 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 to provide monetary assistance to students at the CTCs 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:

- ensure that students' access to emergency aid funds will be as low a barrier as possible;

- 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; 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 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 purchase food, pay for transportation, child care, or other goods or services needed 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. DSHS must request waivers from USDA from federal SNAP regulations to:

- allow higher education institutions 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.

If any part of this act is in conflict with federal law, the conflicting part of this act is inoperative solely to the extent of the conflict and with respect to the agencies directly affected.

DSHS, in consultation with 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.

Appropriation: The bill contains a null and void clause requiring specific funding be provided in an omnibus appropriation act.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: There are students with need, especially around food security. There are students who qualify for SNAP, but cannot use their benefits on campus because the colleges are not set up to take SNAP. Students should be able to use their benefits to get hot meals on campus. There should also be an emergency fund for instances when a student's car breaks down, so a student does not have to quit school. The school could help them get an ORCA card, or get their car fixed, so the student can make it to

class and stay enrolled. A number of students and staff use food pantries, and the system should be improved so anyone who is in need may get access to food on campus.

We know that college hunger is real. There was a recent GAO report on college hunger that estimated 11 percent of all four-year students and 17 percent of all CTC students are food insecure. One study suggests as many as 56 percent of CTC students deal with food insecurity. SNAP is the nation's first line of defense against hunger. The SBCTC supports this. Increased availability of resources for students is important. CTCs do not have enough resources, and what resources they do have are quickly exhausted. The federal government will provide a 505 reimbursement for funds spent on this.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Debra Entenman, Prime Sponsor; Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition; Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline; Erin Frasier, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.