

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6559

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, February 4, 2020

Title: An act relating to increasing the maximum Washington college grant award at independent institutions of higher education.

Brief Description: Increasing the maximum Washington college grant award at independent institutions of higher education.

Sponsors: Senators Conway, Holy, Randall and Wilson, C.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/30/20, 2/04/20 [DP-WM].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases the maximum Washington College Grant award for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions to be the equivalent of the maximum award at the public higher education institutions.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Randall, Chair; Stanford, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Brown and Liias.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

Background: The State Need Grant was modified in 2019 and renamed the Washington College Grant (WCG). The WCG is the state's largest financial aid program and provides awards to low-income students to pursue postsecondary education. The WCG is an entitlement program with guaranteed awards for those students who qualify.

The WCG award amount varies based on the institution the student attends and the student's family income. For students attending the state's public institutions, the maximum award is

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tuition and services and activities fees for 15 quarter credit hours or the equivalent. For students attending private four-year not-for-profit higher education institutions, in 2019-20 the maximum award is \$9,739. The maximum award for students at private four-year not-for-profit institutions may increase by no more than the tuition growth factor annually. An eligible student may receive a WCG for five years or up to 125 percent of the published length of the student's program. Part-time students receive prorated awards.

The tuition growth factor means an increase of no more than the average annual percentage growth rate of the median hourly wage for Washington for the previous 14 years as the wage is determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Summary of Bill: The maximum WCG award for students attending private four-year not-for-profit institutions is modified to be the lesser of the maximum award at a public two or four-year higher education institution or the individual institution's tuition for 15 quarter credits.

Appropriation: None.

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: We are all excited by the expansion of the State Need Grant and the Workforce Investment Act. I was surprised to find out that we have unfortunately set up an equity divide for those students who are not eligible for college bound and wish to attend an independent college. I would like to reduce this equity divide. The Washington College Grant allowed me to choose the best fit for me which was close to home and provided significant aid. Receiving aid means I do not have to work as many hours while juggling school. The Washington College Grant should prioritize all students including those at independent colleges. This funding is critical to students at independent colleges.

OTHER: Being able to have the Washington College Grant was what made it possible for me to attend Whitworth. Without the changes to the college grant I may not be able to afford my dreams. The majority of families and students that I work with are first generation. They are seeking local, high quality postsecondary education opportunities that are affordable. Their first question is often how they pay for school. By bringing the awards at Heritage to parity with the University of Washington and Washington State university we will ensure that students have access to the best fit for them. I chose Heritage in part because I needed and wanted to stay close to home. A higher award at Heritage would make it easier to choose the best fit for me.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Steve Conway, Prime Sponsor; Terri Standish-Kuon, President & CEO, Independent Colleges of Washington; Gracie Anderson, student, Pacific Lutheran University; Deanna Hobbs, student, Pacific Lutheran University.

OTHER: Emily Cziglenyi, citizen; Grisel Rodriguez, Heritage University; Gabriel Pinon, Heritage University.

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