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## Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

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### HB 2214

**Brief Description:** Permitting beneficiaries of public assistance programs to automatically qualify as income-eligible for the purpose of receiving the Washington college grant.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Slatter, Bergquist, Chopp, Ramel, Reeves, Paul, Morgan, Gregerson, Ormsby, Alvarado, Reed, Fosse, Macri, Goodman, Pollet, Leavitt, Timmons, Davis, Riccelli and Duerr; by request of Student Achievement Council.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands demonstration of financial need for Washington College Grant (WCG) eligibility to include students who participate in Washington's Basic Food Program (Basic Food) or the Food Assistance Program (FAP).

**Hearing Date:** 1/17/24

**Staff:** Saranda Ross (786-7068).

#### Background:

##### Washington College Grant.

The Washington College Grant (WCG) is the state's largest financial aid program and provides grants to low-income students to pursue postsecondary education. The WCG is an entitlement program administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) with guaranteed grants for students who qualify. To qualify, a student must:

- demonstrate financial need;
- be a state resident;
- be enrolled at a Washington higher education institution or be enrolled in an approved,

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- registered apprenticeship program;
- file a financial aid application; and
- not already have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Students can demonstrate financial need by meeting income requirements or by the WSAC confirming the student's participation in one of the following state public assistance programs: Aged, Blind, or Disabled Assistance Benefits; Essential Needs and Housing Support; or Pregnant Women Assistance. A student in grade 10, 11, or 12 can demonstrate financial need if their parent or legal guardian receives benefits under one of these public assistance programs and they receive a certificate from the WSAC validating their WCG financial need eligibility. This certificate validates the student's WCG financial need eligibility for one year after high school graduation upon enrollment in a higher education institution, provided the student meets the other WCG eligibility requirements.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) releases an annual list of individuals participating in the public assistance programs listed above so the WSAC can confirm student eligibility for the WCG.

The WCG award amounts vary based on the institution the student attends and the student's financial need. Financial need is based on the state's median family income (MFI) and the student's family size. The WCG awards are prorated based on the student's family income level as follows:

<b>Median Family Income</b>	<b>Grant Award Amount</b>
0-55 percent of state MFI	Maximum Award
56-60 percent of state MFI	70 percent
61-65 percent of state MFI	60 percent
66-70 percent of state MFI	50 percent
71-75 percent of state MFI	24.5 percent
76-100 percent of state MFI	10 percent

The maximum WCG award covers tuition, and services and activities fees, for 15 quarter credits or the equivalent at the state's public institutions. A student is eligible to receive the WCG for five years or up to 125 percent of the published length of the student's program.

### Federal and State Basic Food Programs.

Washington's Basic Food Program (Basic Food) is administered by the DSHS and provides food assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families. Basic Food includes both the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the state-funded Food Assistance Program (FAP). The FAP is for individuals who are legal immigrants and meet all eligibility requirements for SNAP except for citizenship and immigration status. Generally, an individual must be at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level to be eligible for benefits. Congress authorizes funding and establishes SNAP requirements. Students taking at least six credits at an institution of higher education are ineligible to receive Basic Food unless they:

- are age seventeen or younger;
- are age fifty or older;
- are physically or mentally unable to work;
- have paid employment and work an average of at least 20 hours per week each month;
- are self-employed, work, and earn at least the amount they would earn working an average of 20 hours per week at the federal minimum wage each month; or
- were participating in a state or federal work study program during the regular school year.

### **Summary of Bill:**

Demonstration of financial need for WCG eligibility is expanded to include students who participate in Basic Food or the FAP. The annual list of individuals participating in the public assistance programs shared by the DSHS with the WSAC may only be shared to the extent allowable under state and federal law.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 10, 2024.

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