
Postsecondary Education & Workforce Committee

HB 2487

Brief Description: Providing education and assistance for displaced farmworkers.

Sponsors: Representatives Lekanoff, Shavers and Nance.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Farmworkers Education and Assistance Program and the Farmworkers Seeking Education to Career Program.
- Reserves 10 percent of specified scholarships, grants, and programs for qualified displaced farmworkers.

Hearing Date: 2/16/24

Staff: Elizabeth Allison (786-7129).

Background:

The Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office) is created within the Washington Student Achievement Council. The Office administers state and federal financial aid and other education services programs.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a federal financial aid application used to determine a student's eligibility for federal financial aid.

State Work-Study Program.

The Office administers the State Work-Study Program (SWS). The SWS helps low- and middle-income students earn money for college while gaining work experience, often in jobs related to their academic and career goals. Awards are based on the availability of funds and the student's

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determined financial need.

Washington Award for Vocational Excellence.

The Washington Award for Vocational Excellence (WAVE) is a merit-based scholarship for vocational excellence that was created to maximize public awareness of the achievements, leadership ability, and community contributions of students enrolled in occupational training programs in high schools, community colleges, and technical colleges. The WAVE is issued to up to three vocational or technical students in each legislative district, two of whom should be graduating high school students. Students who have completed at least one year of a vocational-technical program in a community college or public technical college are also eligible. The WAVE is granted on an annual basis.

Opportunity Scholarship and Opportunity Grant.

The Washington State Opportunity Scholarship Program (WSOS) was established in 2011 to provide scholarships to low- and middle-income resident students pursuing professional-technical degrees or bachelor's degrees in high-demand majors in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health care. The WSOS was expanded in 2018 to provide scholarships for students in high-demand community and technical college programs, earning advanced degrees in health professions, and studying for high-demand jobs in rural counties. In 2022 professional-technical certificates and professional-technical degrees were expanded to include eligible registered apprenticeship programs. The WSOS is a public-private partnership in which the state matches private contributions to fund the scholarships.

Passport to Careers and Passport to Apprentices.

The Passport to Careers Program was created in 2018 to encourage former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth to prepare for careers through scholarship assistance and other support services such as educational planning, information, and institutional support. Eligible students can access the Passport to Careers Program through two pathways: the Passport to College Promise Program and the Passport to Apprenticeship Opportunities Program.

Washington Health Corps.

The Washington Health Corps was established in 2019 to encourage healthcare professionals to work in critical shortage areas. In exchange for service, healthcare professionals receive assistance with higher education in the form of loan repayment or conditional scholarships. The Washington Health Corps is an umbrella program under which four programs exist:

- the Health Professional Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program;
- the Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program;
- the Nurse Educator Loan Repayment Program; and
- the Forensic Pathologist Loan Repayment Program.

These programs provide licensed professionals with repayment on all or a portion of participants' outstanding student loans in exchange for service at an eligible site. Eligible sites are healthcare facilities that provide comprehensive outpatient, ambulatory, and primary healthcare services.

The Office administers these programs in collaboration with the Department of Health.

Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant Program.

The Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant Program, formerly the National Guard Conditional Scholarship Program, is administered by the Office. Participants receive grants to help pay for postsecondary education program costs for up to five years or 125 percent of the published length of the program, or the credit or clock-hour equivalent. Participants incur an obligation to repay the grant, with interest, unless they serve in the Guard for one year for each year they received the grant. The Office selects participants with the assistance of the Washington Military Department. To be eligible, a person must be an active drilling member of the Washington National Guard in good standing, and must meet a number of specific requirements.

Aerospace Training Student Loan Program.

The Aerospace Loan Program provides low-interest loans to Washington students who have been accepted into the Washington Aerospace Training and Research Center (WATRC) program in Everett. The WATRC was created to help meet the demand for skilled entry-level aerospace workers in Washington.

Summary of Bill:

The Farmworkers Education and Assistance Program (Program) is created to:

- help farmworkers who have been or will be displaced from their jobs in the agricultural industry learn about postsecondary educational opportunities;
- provide outreach to farmworkers to educate them on existing scholarship and grant opportunities available to Washington residents; and
- provide technical support and wraparound services to farmworkers pursuing postsecondary educational opportunities.

A farmworker is a Washington resident who is an agricultural employee or farm labor contractor.

The Office must design and implement, subject to appropriations for that purpose, the Program. The Program must use both English and Spanish, be culturally appropriate, and offer support for displaced farmworkers to enhance awareness of existing grants, scholarships, and apprenticeship opportunities. The Office must convene and consult with an advisory committee to assist in implementation of the Program.

The Office must work with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to identify students and apprentices who are former farmworkers to receive assistance under the Program. Subject to appropriations, institutions of higher education must receive financial and other incentives for achieving measurable progress in recruitment, retention, and graduation of eligible students and farmworkers.

Subject to appropriations, the Office must develop and maintain an internet website and outreach

program available in English and Spanish to serve as a comprehensive portal for farmworkers in Washington who are or will be displaced from the agricultural industry. The website must include information on college applications, college prerequisites and requirements, financial aid applications, and other information.

The Office must partner with organizations that serve the community and provide social services and general assistance, such as the National Community Action Partnership, to develop the Farmworkers Seeking Education to Career Program (FSECP). The FSECP must include a navigator with bilingual capacity. One-on-one appointments with the navigator must be available.

Ten percent of funds from the following scholarships, grants, and programs must be reserved for students who are farmworkers and who otherwise meet the requirements:

- the State Work-Study Program;
- the Washington Award for Vocational Excellence;
- the Opportunity Scholarship and the Opportunity Grant;
- the Passport to Careers and Passport to Apprenticeships Programs;
- the Washington Health Corps;
- the Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant Program; and
- the Aerospace Training Student Loan Program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 8, 2024.

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