

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5904

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, January 17, 2024
Ways & Means, February 5, 2024

Title: An act relating to extending the terms of eligibility for the Washington college grant program, Washington college bound scholarship program, passport to college promise program, and passport to apprenticeship opportunities program.

Brief Description: Extending the terms of eligibility for financial aid programs.

Sponsors: Senators Nobles, Hansen, Dhingra, Frame, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Liias, Lovelett, Nguyen, Randall, Stanford, Trudeau, Valdez and Wilson, C.; by request of Student Achievement Council.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/12/24, 1/17/24 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 1/30/24, 2/05/24 [DP, DNP, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends eligibility for awards under the Washington College Grant, College Bound Scholarship, and Passport to Careers programs from five years or 125 percent of the published length of the student's program, to six years or 150 percent of the published length of the student's program.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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

Signed by Senators Nobles, Chair; Hansen, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Hawkins.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Robinson, Chair; Mullet, Vice Chair, Capital; Nguyen, Vice Chair, Operating; Billig, Conway, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Hunt, Keiser, Pedersen, Randall, Saldaña, Van De Wege and Wellman.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Wilson, L., Ranking Member, Operating; Gildon, Assistant Ranking Member, Operating; Schoesler, Ranking Member, Capital; Boehnke, Muzzall and Wagoner.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Rivers, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Member, Capital; Braun and Torres.

Staff: Michele Alishahi (786-7433)

Background: Washington College Grant. 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. An eligible student may receive a WCG for five years or up to 125 percent of the published length of the student's program.

College Bound Scholarship. The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program was established in 2007 to provide guaranteed four-year tuition to students from low-income families. To receive the CBS, a student must graduate from high school with at least a C grade point average, have no felony convictions, and have a family income that does not exceed 65 percent of the state median family income. The student must maintain satisfactory academic progress and may not receive the scholarship for more than four full-time years.

Passport to Careers. The Passport to Careers program is comprised of the Passport to College and Passport to Apprenticeship grant programs. These programs serve former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth. An individual is eligible for a maximum of five years or until age 26. The total award an individual may receive must not exceed the equivalent amount that would have been awarded for the individual to attend a public university for five years with the highest annual tuition and state-mandated fees.

Summary of Bill: A student is eligible to receive an award under the WCG, CBS, Passport

to College, or Passport to Apprenticeships for six years or up to 150 percent of the published length of the student's program, or the credit or clock-hour equivalent. The requirement that a student use a passport award before age 26 is eliminated.

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 (Higher Education & Workforce Development):

PRO: Access to higher education expands opportunities in many ways. But each student's journey is unique and various factors can make it hard to complete. The maximum to receive state aid varies across programs and all are shorter than the federal standard. The Washington College Grant is the most generous and equitable program in the country. While the WGC will last for 15 quarters, the federal pell grant lasts for 18. Inconsistencies like these make it difficult for low and middle-income students to finish. Consistency across programs will provide predictable support and increase access. Only about 1 in 20 students will continue on to a sixth year. But it makes sense to align the eligibility for all our programs. As a student that has had many health struggles it may take me longer to complete my degree. I am not alone. Having extra time to complete will help students with barriers to complete. Extending eligibility supports equitable access. The shortened financial aid timeframes compared to federal aid presents a meaningful financial cliff for many students. Students should not have to be financial aid experts to be able to complete their programs. The varying time frames of financial aid programs adds unnecessary stress for students. Collectively we have not done enough for foster youth to achieve their educational goals at equitable rates. Of all student demographics, students in foster care will disproportionately benefit from the changes in this bill. At my institution, over 60 percent of my peers are recipients of state financial aid. Extending access to these programs will allow low and middle income students to invest in their future.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Senator T'wina Nobles, Prime Sponsor; Jacob Vigdor, University of Washington Faculty; Fred Kingston, Treehouse; Ben Mitchell, Foundation for Tacoma Students; Fahren Johnson, School's Out Washington; Isha Hussein, Seeds of Peace; Emily Stochel, College Success Foundation; Fred Kingston, Treehouse; Mollie Kuwahara, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Yokiko Hayashi-Saguil, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Prem Subedi; Joel Anderson, Washington Student Achievement Council; Collin Bannister, The Associated Students of Washington State University; Ranayjah Jackson; Stella Seth, Legislative Liaison, Associated Students of Western Washington University; Cher Aguilar Henriquez.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: For those within one year of losing access to their state financial aid, this legislation is a worthwhile investment in making sure they can earn a degree or credential without taking on student loan debt or dropping out altogether. If we've already invested in students for five years, why wouldn't we stick with those that need just a little extra time to achieve their degree? This bill helps low-income students who have to balance curriculum, mental health illnesses, disabilities, unexpected changes and still be able to have access to higher education. Many potential Passport Partnership Program recipients aren't eligible because of their age, the average age for construction trade apprenticeships is 32.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Joel Anderson, Washington Student Achievement Council; Cher Aguilar Henriquez; Jacob Vigdor, University of Washington Faculty; Liz Trautman, High School Success Coalition; Paula Sardinias, WBBA; Collin Bannister, The Washington Student Association; Mirian Mencias, Legislative Liaison, Associated Student, UW Seattle; Juliet Schindler, College Success Foundation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.