

SENATE BILL 605

By Norris

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4, Part 9, relative to postsecondary financial assistance from net lottery proceeds for independent students.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4, Part 9, is amended by adding the following language as a new section:

(a) This section shall be known and may be cited as the “Community College Reconnect Grant.”

(b) To be eligible for a Community College Reconnect Grant, a student shall:

(1) Not be ineligible for the grant under § 49-4-904;

(2) Have been a Tennessee resident, as defined by regulations promulgated by the board of regents under § 49-8-104, for one (1) year immediately preceding the date of application for the grant;

(3) Not have been enrolled in or attended any postsecondary institution for at least twenty-four (24) months immediately preceding the date of initial enrollment in the Community College Reconnect Grant program;

(4) Have earned a minimum of thirty (30) semester hours toward completion of an associate of applied science degree as determined by the postsecondary institution attended;

(5) File the FAFSA by March 1 prior to the beginning of each academic year;

(6) Be an independent student as determined by the FAFSA;

(7) Apply for the grant by filing a Community College Reconnect Grant application as required by TSAC by June 1 prior to the beginning of each academic year;

(8) For the 2016–2017 academic year, be admitted to and enroll in a public two-year postsecondary institution; and

(9) Have an adjusted gross income attributable to the student that does not exceed thirty-six thousand dollars (\$36,000).

(c) To be eligible for a Community College Reconnect Grant, a student shall not be required to meet any academic standard at the time of enrollment in the eligible public two-year postsecondary institution; except, that the student shall be mathematically able at the time of enrollment to achieve any grade point average required for graduation with the degree sought, as determined by the postsecondary institution attended.

(d) To continue to be eligible for a Community College Reconnect Grant, a student shall:

(1) Enroll in classes that lead to completion of an associate of applied science degree;

(2) Maintain satisfactory academic progress and a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0 as determined by the institution attended;

(3) Maintain continuous enrollment at an eligible public postsecondary institution;

(4) Reapply for the scholarship as specified by TSAC; and

(5) Enroll in at least nine (9) semester hours per semester during any fall or spring semester, unless otherwise required by the specific academic program in which the student is enrolled. The student may enroll in fewer than nine (9) semester hours in a summer semester.

(e) If a student ceases to be eligible for the Community College Reconnect Grant at any time for any reason, then the student shall not be able to regain the grant.

(f)

(1) A student may receive a Community College Reconnect Grant under this section until the occurrence of the first of the following events:

(A) The student has earned an associate of applied science degree;

(B) The student has attempted the total number of semester hours necessary for completion of the degree; or

(C) Two (2) years have passed since the initial date of enrollment as a Community College Reconnect Grant student, exclusive of an approved leave of absence.

(2) A student who has an approved medical or personal leave of absence from the eligible public two-year postsecondary institution may continue to receive the scholarship upon resuming the student's education at the eligible public two-year postsecondary institution; provided, that the student continues to meet all applicable eligibility requirements.

(g) A student who receives a Community College Reconnect Grant may transfer from one eligible public two-year postsecondary institution to another eligible public two-year postsecondary institution without loss of the scholarship; provided, that the student:

(1) Continues to meet all requirements for the scholarship;

(2) Applies and is admitted to the eligible public two-year postsecondary institution to which the student seeks to transfer;

(3) Shall be able to complete the degree before reaching a terminating event; and

(4) Notifies TSAC of the transfer as required by TSAC.

(h) Subject to the amounts appropriated by the general assembly and any law relating to a shortfall in funds available for postsecondary financial assistance from the net proceeds of the state lottery, the amount of a Community College Reconnect Grant shall not exceed the cost of tuition and mandatory fees at the eligible public two-year postsecondary institution attended less all other gift aid, which shall be credited first to the student's tuition and mandatory fees. In the semester of attendance in which the degree is obtained, the grant amount shall not exceed the amount required for the student to complete the degree.

(i) Notwithstanding the provisions of § 49-4-902, gift aid under this section shall include financial aid received from a federal Pell grant, a Tennessee student assistance award, and any scholarship or grant funded from net lottery proceeds under this part.

(j) Notwithstanding § 49-4-903(a), TSAC shall award Community College Reconnect Grants on a first-come, first-served basis; provided, however, that no more than a total of one million five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,500,000) of net lottery proceeds shall be expended for Community College Reconnect Grants during the life of the program, should such amount be available as determined by the general assembly.

(k) Only students obtaining a Community College Reconnect Grant during the 2016–2017 academic year shall be eligible to receive the grant in any academic year beyond the 2016–2017 academic year.

(l) The comptroller of the treasury, through the comptroller's office of research and education accountability, shall review and study the Community College Reconnect Grant program to determine the effectiveness of the program in encouraging independent students to complete their associate of applied science degree. The office of research and education accountability shall report its findings and conclusions to the

speakers of the senate and house of representatives and the education committees of the senate and house of representatives before December 31, 2017.

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-923(g), is amended by adding the following sentence at the end of the subsection:

Notwithstanding the provisions of § 49-4-902, gift aid as used in this section shall be financial aid received from a federal Pell grant, a Tennessee student assistance award, and any scholarship or grant funded from net lottery proceeds under this part.

SECTION 3. TSAC is authorized to promulgate rules to effectuate the purposes of Section 1 of this act, including the determination of student eligibility, leaves of absence, and the distribution of funds appropriated for scholarships under the program. All such rules shall be promulgated in accordance with Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4, Chapter 5.

SECTION 4. For the purpose of the promulgation of the rules, this act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it. For the purpose of amending § 49-4-923, Section 2 shall take effect July 1, 2015, at 12:01 a.m., the public welfare requiring it. For all other purposes, this act shall take effect July 1, 2016, the public welfare requiring it.