

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5904

As Reported by House Committee On:
Postsecondary Education & Workforce
Appropriations

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:

Postsecondary Education & Workforce: 2/16/24, 2/20/24 [DP];

Appropriations: 2/23/24, 2/26/24 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by Committee)

- Extends eligibility for awards under the Washington College Grant, College Bound Scholarship, and Passport to Careers Program to six years or 150 percent of the published length of the student's program, or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Reed, Vice Chair; Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Waters, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen, Leavitt, Nance, Paul, Pollet, Schmidt and Timmons.

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.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Klicker and McEntire.

Staff: Saranda Ross (786-7068).

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 students who qualify. Award amounts vary based on the institution the student attends and the student's family income. An eligible student may receive the WCG for up to five years or 125 percent of the published length of the student's program, or the credit or clock-hour equivalent.

College Bound Scholarship.

The College Bound Scholarship (CBS) program was established in 2007 to provide recipients who attend two-year or four-year public institutions of higher education an award to cover the cost of tuition and fees, minus any state-funded grant, scholarship, or waiver assistance. Recipients of the CBS also receive \$500 for books and materials. 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. Beginning in fall of 2023 there is no high school grade point average requirement for students to receive the CBS at a community or technical college. Recipients must maintain satisfactory academic progress, and may not receive the scholarship for more than four full-time years.

Passport to Careers Program.

The Passport to Careers Program (Passport to Careers) 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 Passport to Careers through two pathways: the Passport to College Promise Program (Passport to College) and the Passport to Apprenticeship Opportunities Program (Passport to Apprenticeship). An individual is eligible for Passport to College for a maximum of five years or until age 26, whichever comes first. The total award an individual may receive must not exceed the resident undergraduate tuition and fees at the highest-priced public institution of higher education in the state. An individual is eligible for Passport to Apprenticeship for a maximum of six years or until age 26, whichever comes first.

Summary of Bill:

A student is eligible to receive an award under the WCG, the CBS, Passport to College, or Passport to Apprenticeship 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 to Careers award before age 26 is eliminated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Despite the generosity of Washington's financial aid, all three of the programs in this bill offer less time than the federal Pell Grant for students to earn their degree or credential. Consistency for these programs will reduce confusion for recipients while also reducing administrative burdens for campus financial aid staff. This bill ensures completion of college degrees. When students exhaust their eligibility for state financial aid, they often take on student loan debt to graduate or drop out of their programs altogether. These inconsistencies are destabilizing for low- and middle-income students, making this bill a key equity issue for the state. The Washington Student Achievement Council found that students identifying as Black, Hispanic, or Native American receiving both Pell Grant and WCG funding were disproportionately more likely to exhaust need-based aid. Statewide, about 1 in 20 WCG recipients continue on to a sixth year. One in four WCG recipients will not complete a full-time course load in the first year. The cost to the state is modest, at a 1 to 2 percent increase in expenditures on the WCG overall.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator T'wina Nobles, prime sponsor; Joel Anderson, Washington Student Achievement Council; Jacob Vigdor and Ellis Andrews, University of Washington; Collin Bannister, Washington Student Association and Associated Students of Washington State University; Juliet Schindler, College Success Foundation and High School Success Coalition; Sean Behl, Associated Student Government of Bellevue College; Stella Seth, Associated Students and Western Washington University; and Paula Sardinas, Washington Build Back Black Alliance.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 21 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Callan, Chopp, Davis, Fitzgibbon, Lekanoff, Pollet, Riccelli, Ryu, Senn, Simmons, Slatter, Springer, Stonier and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Rude, Schmick and Wilcox.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Corry, Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Harris, Sandlin and Stokesbary.

Staff: Kate Henry (786-7349).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Postsecondary Education & Workforce:

The Appropriations Committee recommended the addition of a null and void clause, making the bill null and void unless funding is provided in the budget.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) All three of the programs in this bill offer less time than the federal Pell Grant for students to earn their degree or credential. When students exhaust their eligibility for state financial aid, they often take on student loan debt to graduate or drop out of their programs altogether. The Washington Student Achievement Council found that students identifying as Black, Hispanic, or Native American were disproportionately more likely to exhaust need-based aid. The current five-year cap can lead to equity issues for students with barriers that require extended time to finish a degree. The Washington College Grant (WCG) is the most generous and equitable financial aid program in the nation and aligning eligibility duration with the Pell Grant will provide consistency, predictability, and increased access for students. First generation, English as their second language, and students receiving the maximum WCG based on median family income have a more difficult time matriculating. This bill will provide a better future for Washington students.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Joel Anderson, Washington Student Achievement Council; Paula Sardinas, Washington Build Black Alliance; and Collin Bannister, The Washington Student Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.