

SB 291 (LEYVA)

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID PROGRAM

FACT SHEET

Summary

SENATE BILL 291 (LEYVA)

SB 291 expands state financial aid to address inequity in and make a meaningful commitment to community college affordability, and create new opportunities for the most vulnerable Californians.

"For too long California community colleges have been overlooked in terms of financial aid, especially state-based aid. SB 291 will change that by giving low-income students a real chance at educational achievement, providing proper financial assistance that takes into account the total cost of attendance."

- Iiyshaa Youngblood, Former Student,
Moreno Valley College

BACKGROUND

California community colleges serve more than 2.1 million students at 115 campuses across the state. While tuition has remained low at our community colleges, it is still difficult for most lower-income students to achieve their educational goals due to our state's higher cost of living and the lack of adequate financial aid to cover non-tuition expenses such as textbooks, transportation, basic housing and food. Most community college students work multiple jobs to try and make ends meet. While our state has led the nation in innovative programs like the California College Promise Grant, which waives tuition for roughly 50 percent of our students, other financial aid options fall short of covering non-tuition costs that make up the majority of student expenses. Even with tuition waived, financial challenges remain the greatest obstacle to college completion.



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PROBLEM

Historically, higher education funding policy has focused on making community college tuition more affordable. California boasts the lowest tuition in the nation (\$1,380 annually), with the California College Promise Grant covering tuition for low-income students. Even so, community colleges are often the least affordable option for students when non-tuition costs like housing, food, and textbooks are considered. That is, need-based financial aid to cover non-tuition costs is so limited for community college students that it is often more expensive for the lowest-income students to attend California community colleges than the University of California.

SOLUTION

Greater and more equitable investment in community college students must be a key strategy for California's long-term prosperity. The program, administered by the California Community Colleges Board of Governors, would target new financial aid based on three principles:

1. All California Community College students with financial need should be eligible to receive financial aid—regardless of their age, time out of high school, or high school academic performance.
2. A student's financial aid should be linked to the total cost of attendance—not just tuition and fees, but also housing, food, transportation, and supplies.
3. A student should have access to financial aid regardless of the student's educational goals—that is, financial aid should be available equitably whether the student seeks to complete a degree, certificate, or short-term career-technical education program.

The program would provide a community college student with a new grant that is linked to the cost of attendance and accounts for the gift aid a student already receives and the resources the student contributes to college costs. This new aid should help students eliminate loan debt and reduce excessive work obligations, giving them the support they need to complete their programs on time.

SB 291 is necessary to ensure a meaningful commitment to college affordability by providing significant additional financial support to students with the greatest financial need.