WEST VIRGINIA CODE CHAPTER 18C ARTICLE 9

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§18C-9-1. Short title.

This article shall be known and may be cited as the WV Invests Grant Program.

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§18C-9-2. Legislative findings and purpose.

(a) The Legislature hereby finds and declares that:

(1) Every West Virginian should have access to education and training that will lead directly to quality employment opportunities within the state. In order for West Virginia to retain and attract business and industry, it must ensure that its workforce has such education and training;

(2) West Virginia currently faces a human capital crisis, as the state regularly ranks amongst the lowest states in the nation in workforce participation rates. Improving the state's workforce participation rates and the level of the workforce's career education is critical to economic development and making West Virginia a more prosperous state;

(3) The 2017 West Virginia Forward Report, a strategy for economic development and job growth, found that "investments in improving human capital are considered the most significant opportunity for improvement in West Virginia, especially because access to a specialized workforce is a significant factor for investment attraction…";

(4) According to the United States Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median yearly earnings of an individual with an associate's degree is approximately $6,604 more than an individual with only a high school diploma. Therefore, any investment by the state into a citizen obtaining such a degree would be repaid multiple times over through the citizen's increased contributions to the economy and tax base;

(5) West Virginia is currently facing a devastating drug epidemic, and the hope that comes with increased access to career education and higher quality employment opportunities is an indispensable tool against the spread of drug addiction; and

(6) An investment by the state into increasing access to post-secondary career education will provide its citizens the hope and opportunity for better career opportunities, and provide the state with the trained workforce needed to attract significant economic development.

(b) The purpose of this article is to provide West Virginians with hope and economic prosperity by increasing access to a higher level of career education that is needed to fulfill the needs of today's workforce and provide for further economic development.

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§18C-9-3. Definitions.

As used in this article:

"Academic fees" means fees charged to students for specific courses or programs to support such expenses such as lab or equipment costs.

"Council" means the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education.

"Commission" means the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

"Eligible institution" means a public community and technical college under the authority of the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education, or a public or not-for-profit private baccalaureate institution authorized by the Higher Education Policy Commission that grants associate degrees satisfying the requirements of participating in Advanced Career Education (ACE) program partnerships in accordance with §18-2E-11 of this code, or a not-for-profit, hospital-based allied health program authorized by the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education.

"Eligible post-secondary program" means a curriculum of courses leading to a certificate or associate degree at an eligible institution which satisfies a course of study that has been deemed by the council to satisfy a workforce need.

"Tuition" means the semester or term charges imposed by an eligible institution and, additionally, all mandatory fees required as a condition of enrollment by all students.

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§18C-9-4. WV Invests Grant Program.

(a) There is hereby created a grant program known as the WV Invests Grant Program, which shall be administered by the vice chancellor for administration in accordance with this article.

(b) The council shall award WV Invests Grants pursuant to the following terms and conditions:

(1) A WV Invests Grant may only be awarded to applicants satisfying the requirements provided in §18C-9-5 of this code;

(2) The maximum amount of a WV Invests Grant shall be the cost of tuition mandatory fees, and academic program fees for coursework leading to completion of the chosen associate degree or certificate, less all other state and federal scholarships and grants for which the student is eligible: *Provided*, That all academic program fees charged in addition to base tuition must be approved by the Council for Community and Technical College Education to be eligible for the West Virginia Invests Grant as set forth in this article. All other state and federal scholarships and grants for which the grant recipient is eligible shall be deducted from the amount of the WV Invests Grant for each individual student. The amount of a WV Invests Grant at an eligible public or not-for-profit private baccalaureate institution shall not exceed the average cost of tuition and mandatory fees of the community and technical colleges;

(3) Grant payments shall be made directly to the eligible institutions;

(4) If a grant recipient transfers from one eligible institution to another, the grant is transferable only with approval of the vice chancellor for administration;

(5) A WV Invests Grant may be used at any eligible institution to seek an associate degree or certificate in an eligible post-secondary program. An institution is not required to accept a grant recipient for enrollment and may enforce its own admission requirements, standards, and policies; and

(6) If a WV Invests Grant recipient terminates enrollment for any reason during the academic year, the unused portion of the grant shall be returned by the institution to the council in accordance with the council's policy for issuing refunds. The council shall transfer such funds to the WV Invests Fund for allocation and expenditure.

(c) On or before January 1 annually, the council shall provide to the Legislature and the Governor a report on the WV Invests Grant Program, which shall include, but not be limited to, research and data concerning student success and grant retention.

(d) The council shall propose legislative rules for legislative approval pursuant to §29A-3A-1 *et seq*. of this code to implement the provisions of this article, which shall provide for:

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(1) Application requirements and deadlines fully implementing requirements of this article;

(2) Appeal procedures for the denial or revocation of the grant; and

(3) Any other provisions necessary to effectuate the purposes of this article.

(e) The Legislature hereby declares that an emergency situation exists and, therefore, the council may establish, by emergency rule, under the procedures of §29A-3A-1 *et seq*. of this code, a rule to implement the provisions of this article.

(f) Beginning with the 2021 fiscal year, and for every fiscal year thereafter, any appropriation by the Legislature to support and or alleviate the cost to citizens in this state to obtain advanced certifications and associate degrees shall only be distributed to those community and technical colleges or public or not-for-profit private baccalaureate institutions that form one or more partnerships to establish ACE programs and pathways. Once distributed, such funds may be used to support any eligible post-secondary program or pathway provided by an eligible institution leading to the award of such degree or certification.

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§18C-9-5. Eligibility requirements; agreements.

(a) To be eligible for a WV Invests Grant, an individual must satisfy the following requirements:

(1) Be a citizen or legal resident of the United States and have been a resident of West Virginia for at least one year immediately preceding the date of application for a grant;

(2) Have completed a secondary education program in a public, private, or home school;

(3) Have not been previously awarded a bachelor's degree: *Provided*, That individuals who have previously been awarded a bachelor's degree may qualify for the grant if they are seeking an associate degree or certificate in an eligible post-secondary program for emergency medical services;

(4) Be at least 18 years of age: *Provided*, That individuals younger than 18 years of age may qualify for the grant upon completion of a secondary education program in a public, private, or home school;

(5) Meet the admission requirements of, and be admitted into, an eligible institution;

(6) Satisfactorily meet any additional qualifications of enrollment, academic promise, or achievement as established by the council through rule;

(7) Have filed a completed free application for federal student aid for the academic year in which the grant award is sought;

(8) Be enrolled in an eligible post-secondary program;

(9) Be enrolled in at least six credit hours per semester;

(10) Have completed a WV Invests Grant application as provided by the council in accordance with a schedule established by the council; and

(b) Each grant may be awarded and renewed up to a lifetime total of six full-time equivalent semesters, until the course of study is completed as long as the following qualifications, as determined by the vice chancellor for administration and the council, are satisfied:

(1) Maintaining satisfactory academic standing, including a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.0;

(2) Making adequate progress toward completion of the eligible post-secondary program;

(3) Satisfactory participation in a community service program authorized by the council. The council shall include in the legislative rules, required by §18C-9-4 of this code, provisions for the administration of community service requirements, including, but not limited to,

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requiring completion of at least eight hours of unpaid community service during the time of study, which may include, but is not limited to, participating with nonprofit, governmental, institutional, or community-based organizations designed to improve the quality of life for community residents, meet the needs of community residents, or foster civic responsibility;

(4) Continued satisfaction of eligibility requirements provided by §18C-9-5(a) of this code; and

(5) Satisfaction of any additional eligibility criteria established by the council through legislative rule.

(c) Each recipient of a WV Invests Grant shall enter into an agreement with the vice chancellor for administration, which shall require repayment of an amount of the grant or grants awarded to the recipient, in whole or in part, if a recipient chooses to reside outside the state within two years following either obtainment of the degree or certificate for which the grant or grants were awarded or enrollment at an eligible institution ends, whichever occurs later: *Provided*, That while enrolled out-of-state for further post-secondary education, the recipient may request deferment of the two-year residency requirement. The council may not require a recipient to repay grants, in whole or in part, unless the prospective recipient has been informed of this requirement in writing before initial acceptance of the grant award. Each WV Invests Grant agreement shall include the following:

(1) Disclosure of the full terms and conditions under which assistance under this article is provided and under which repayment may be required; and

(2) A description of the appeals procedure required to be established under this article.

(d) WV Invests Grant recipients found to be in noncompliance with the agreement entered into under §18C-9-5(c) of this code shall be required to repay the amount of the grant awards received, plus interest, and, where applicable, reasonable collection fees, on a schedule and at a rate of interest prescribed in rules promulgated by the council. The council shall also provide for proration of the amount to be repaid by a recipient who maintains employment in the state for a period of time within the time period required under §18C-9-5(c) of this code.

(e) A recipient is not in violation of an agreement entered into pursuant to §18C-9-5(c) of this code during any period in which the recipient is meeting any of the following conditions:

(1) Pursuing a half-time course of study at an accredited institution of higher education;

(2) Serving as a member of the armed services of the United States;

(3) Failing to comply with the terms of the agreement due to death or permanent or temporary disability as established by sworn affidavit of a qualified physician; or

(4) Satisfying the provisions of any additional repayment exemptions prescribed by the

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council through rule.

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§18C-9-6. WV Invests Fund; established.

(a) The WV Invests Fund is hereby created in the State Treasury as a special revenue account. The fund shall be administered by the vice chancellor for administration and may consist of:

(1) All appropriations by the Legislature for the WV Invests Fund;

(2) Any gifts, grants, or contributions received for the WV Invests Fund; and

(3) All interest or other income earned from investment of the WV Invests Fund.

(b) The WV Invests Fund shall be expended for the purpose of administering the WV Invests Grant Program, including the awarding of grants authorized by this article. Any funds remaining in the fund at the close of the fiscal year are carried forward for use in the next fiscal year.

(c) Nothing in this section requires any specific level of funding by the Legislature nor guarantees or entitles any individual to any benefit or grant of funds.

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