

## **AB 2251 (Rodriguez)**

### **Improving Student Access to Financial Aid Through COA Budget Clarity and Adjustments**

---

#### **OVERVIEW**

Assembly Bill 2251, authored by Assemblymember Celeste Rodriguez, seeks to ensure that California students can fully access the financial aid they are eligible for. The bill would increase transparency around institutional Cost of Attendance (COA) budgets and standardize the COA adjustments process for students. This bill maximizes COA flexibilities already authorized under federal law and ensures that students understand their COA and how to appeal for a COA adjustment.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Cost of Attendance (COA) is a core component in determining a student's financial aid eligibility and the maximum amount of aid they can receive. COA represents a college or university's determination of the total estimated cost of attending college, including tuition, fees, housing, food, transportation, books, and various other expenses. Federal and state policies allow financial aid administrators to adjust a student's COA on a documented, case-by-case basis so that aid awards respond to students' special circumstances, particularly when they face unexpected hardships or changes in financial status.

#### **PROBLEM**

When used effectively, the COA adjustment process enables institutions to ensure that students have access to the resources they need to remain enrolled and succeed. This process is particularly important for students at heightened risk, including students who have experienced foster care or homelessness, who are eligible for additional forms of financial assistance to meet their basic needs. As it stands, these students are frequently forced to turn down urgently needed aid because they have reached their COA cap.

At present, COA appeal practices vary widely across campuses, leaving students unaware that adjustments are available. A recent [report](#) by the California State Auditor found that many institutions do not make information about how COA figures are calculated publicly accessible. A separate statewide [analysis](#) found that two-thirds of institutions do not publish COA appeal information online, often leaving students unaware of this important opportunity.

#### **SOLUTION**

To ensure that California students can fully access the financial aid for which they are eligible based on their actual expenses, AB 2251 would require, as a condition of participation in the Cal Grant program:

- Increased transparency of COA budgets and adjustment policies by requiring institutions to make COA information publicly available on their websites.
- The ability for students to request adjustments to any expense category included in the institution's COA budget, without limits on the number of requests, and with timely review.
- A second-level review process for students whose adjustment requests are denied.

**For more information contact: Brenda Cisneros-Larios ([Brenda.Cisneros-Larios@asm.ca.gov](mailto:Brenda.Cisneros-Larios@asm.ca.gov)) or Jessica Petrass ([jessica@jbay.org](mailto:jessica@jbay.org)).**