



Celeste Rodriguez

ASSEMBLYWOMAN ————— DISTRICT 43



Assembly Bill 2251

Improving Student Access to Financial Aid

SUMMARY

Every student in California should be able to fully access the financial aid they are eligible for. AB 2251 expands students' access to financial aid by increasing transparency around institutional Cost of Attendance (COA) budget calculations and standardizing the COA adjustment process. This bill ensures that students across California have an accessible, consistent, and timely pathway to request additional adjustments that reflect their existing financial circumstances.

BACKGROUND

COA is a core component in determining a student's financial aid eligibility and the maximum amount of aid they can receive. COA represents an institution's estimate of the total cost of attending college, including tuition, fees, housing, food, transportation, books, and other related expenses. Federal policy allows financial aid administrators to adjust a student's COA on a documented, case-by-case basis when actual expenses exceed an institution's COA budget. When used effectively, the COA adjustment process helps ensure 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, and who may be eligible for additional forms of financial assistance to meet their basic needs.

PROBLEM

Current limitations force students to decline urgently needed aid because they have reached their COA cap. Existing COA appeal practices vary widely across campuses, leaving students unaware of the available adjustments. A recent report by the California State Auditor found that many institutions do not make publicly accessible information about how COA figures are calculated. A separate statewide analysis found that nearly

half of institutions do not publish COA appeal information online, often limiting student awareness of this option.

SOLUTION

AB 2251 will give California students a fair opportunity to fully access the financial aid they are eligible for, maximizing COA flexibility already authorized under federal law. To participate in the Cal Grant program, institutions would be required to:

- Publish COA information, budget, and adjustment policies on their public website.
- Provide students with the ability to request an adjustment to any expense category included in the institution's COA budget, without limits on the number of requests, and under a timely review.
- Not impose COA adjustment request deadlines earlier than three weeks before the end of each term.
- At the discretion of the institution, provide a second-level review process for students whose adjustment requests are denied.
- Accept COA adjustment requests in either electronic or hard copy form.

CONTACT

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SUPPORT

California State Student Association (Co-sponsor)
California Student Aid Commission (Co-sponsor)
John Burton Advocated for Youth (Co-sponsor)
The Institute for College Access & Success (Co-sponsor)
University of California Student Association (Co-sponsor)
UAspire (Co-sponsor)
3rd Street Youth Center & Clinic
Allies for Evert Child
Cal Poly Humboldt Elite Scholars Program

California Alliance Of Caregivers
California Competes: Higher Education For A Strong
Economy
Chabot College Nextup Guardian Scholars Program
Children Now
Children Youth & Family Collaborative
Children's Law Center of California
Create Alternatives
Edtrust-West
Foster Youth Pre-College Collective
Genup
Indivisible Alta Pasadena
The Institute for College Access & Success
Journey House
Los Angeles Unified School District
National Center for Youth Law (NCYL)
Nextgen California
Ohlone College Nextup
Orange County United Way
Public Advocates
Public Counsel Tay
Redwood Community Action Agency-Youth Services
Bureau
Rio Hondo College
Rowland Unified School District
San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
San Bernardino Valley College Guardian Scholars
San Diego City College - Nextup Program
San Francisco State GSP Program
Santa Ana College GSP
Santa Cruz County Office of Education
Schoolhouse Connection
Southern California College Attainment Network
UC Davis Guardian Scholars
UC Riverside Foster Youth Support Services
UCLA Calkids Institute
United Friends of The Children

