

Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, Sr.

59th Assembly District



AB-295: Free College for California Students

SUMMARY

Develops a working group consisting of representatives from higher education institutional boards, faculty, staff, and students to provide cost-free college to California residents.

BACKGROUND

The Master Plan for Higher Education (1960-1975) established that the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems be tuition-free for all residents of the state. Over 45 years later, the state has moved in an entirely different direction considering CSU tuition and fees have risen by 1360% and UC tuition and fees have risen by 555%.

Students are finding it increasingly more difficult to afford their education while also sustaining their basic needs. As an example, 80% of CSU students receive financial aid, while 34.4% are food insecure and 7.2% report experiencing both food insecurity and homelessness. Also, the California Community Colleges found in March 2019 that 60% of their students were experiencing housing insecurity while 19% were homeless. The study also found that 52% of respondents were experiencing food insecurity.

In 2018 the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed, the California College Promise Program (AB 19), which makes the first two years of community college tuition-free. This law has provided significant relief to traditional full-time students. We must build off of its success to meet the needs of part-time, students experiencing homelessness, and students facing food insecurity. According to the California Budget and Policy Center, although financial assistance like Cal Grant B and CalFresh available, the purchasing power of those grants has not kept up with the exponentially rising costs of higher education.

College students often have to choose between studying or working to afford their tuition and living expenses. According to The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS), a low income CSU student would have to work 20-55 hours a week to cover the net cost of their education. The total cost of college today is inaccessible for students of low-income backgrounds, and puts them at a disadvantage.

At the California Community Colleges, in-state tuition rose from \$1,331 for the 2018-2019 year to \$3,970 for the 2019-2020 year. At the CSUs, in-state tuition and fees equates to \$5,742. Accounting for inflation, \$5,742 in June 2020 equates to \$659.29 in June 1960 and \$1,193.85 in June 1975. At the UCs, the in-state tuition and fees for the 2020-2021 year will rise to \$14,100. In June 2020, \$14,100 equates to \$1,618.95 in June 1960 and \$2,931.61 in June 1975.

As the CSU and UC systems have continued to propose tuition and fee increases, the state has invested in increased financial aid in the form of a Middle Class Scholarship. However, many students remain unable to afford attendance at the state's public universities, and as costs rise, access for historically marginalized communities diminishes.

Expanding access to higher education is a mutually beneficial investment for California. A Bachelor's degree increases a person's earning potential by 65% according to the U.S. Bureau of Statistics, which increases the overall tax contributions to the State in the long term.

THIS BILL

AB-295 establishes a working group consisting of representatives from the State Department of Education, Board of Governors of California Community Colleges, the Trustees of California State University, the Regents of the University of California, and higher education faculty, staff, and students to develop a pilot program that would provide free postsecondary education in the state by replacing the system of charging enrolled students tuition, fees, and additional costs of attending a postsecondary institution.

SUPPORT

American Academy of Pediatrics, California Generation Up

CONTACT

Natalia Garcia ♦ Legislative Assistant
(916) 319-2059 ♦ Natalia.Garcia@asm.ca.gov

CAPITOL OFFICE
STATE CAPITOL, ROOM 2117
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814
TEL: 916.319.2059
FAX: 916-319-2159

DISTRICT OFFICE
700 EXPOSITION PARK DRIVE
LOS ANGELES, CA 90037
TEL: 213.744.2111
FAX: 213.744.2122