

Date of Hearing: April 18, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 559 (Santiago) – As Introduced February 14, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Community colleges: enrollment fee waiver

**SUMMARY:** Requires the Board of Governors (BOG) of the California Community Colleges (CCC), by January 1, 2019, to ensure that students at every community college can complete and submit the board's fee waiver (BOGFW) applications electronically.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes a \$46/unit fee for students at the CCC, and fee waivers for certain types of students, as specified. (Education Code (EC) Section 76300.)
- 2) Provides funding through state apportionments, pursuant to provisional language in the annual budget act, to offset districts' loss of fee revenue due to the BOGFW.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** One-time programming costs for the CCC Chancellor's Office for programming to provide for online BOGFW applications.

**COMMENTS:**

*Background.* In 1984, California enacted the first CCC enrollment fee at \$5 per unit, with a maximum of \$50 per semester and \$100 per year. Simultaneously, the BOG was required to establish a financial aid program to negate the effect of enrollment fees on access for low-income students. The BOGFW program was designed to ensure that students with financial need did not face a barrier to enrollment.

Over the 2015-16 academic year, the CCC served about 2.3 million students, with about 1.6 million students enrolling in each of the fall 2015 and spring 2016 semesters. For that same year, about one million students, or 43% of all students, received a BOGFW—an equivalent of \$800 million in waived fees. The vast majority of students receiving the waiver do so because of limited family income or demonstrated financial need.

*Purpose.* According to the author's office, only 21 of 72 community college districts currently accept electronic submissions of the BOGFW application. Most districts instead rely on paper applications that must be submitted in-person or through the mail. The author believes this creates unnecessary extra steps for students, which can be particularly burdensome if they lack access to transportation. The author notes that, for students who do not fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), or who miss the deadline to apply for the term in which they intend to start school, their only option for financial assistance is the BOGFW. The author maintains that this form ought to be available for electronic submission for the sake of convenience.

*Prior Legislation.* In 2016, AB 1583 (Santiago) included the same provisions as this bill—subsequently amended out—in addition to several other provisions expanding the BOGFW. AB 1583 failed passage in Senate Education.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

None on file.

**Opposition**

None on file.

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