

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 3034 (Low) – As Amended March 19, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Public postsecondary education: waiver of tuition and fees: California Conservation Corps.

**SUMMARY:** Requires the California State University (CSU), and requests the University of California (UC), to waive tuition and mandatory systemwide fees for two years to any full-time student who has served in the California Conservations Corps for at least one year. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Stipulates a California Conservation Corps Member must meet all the following in order to have all tuition and fees including registration fees, differential fees, or incidental fees, (as enumerated in the summary above) waived:
  - a) Completed one year of paid service to the California Conservation Corps;
  - b) Maintains full-time enrollment in an undergraduate program at the CSU or UC;
  - c) Maintains a minimum grade point average and meets other conditions necessary for the student to be in good standing at the institution, as determined by the CSU or UC; and,
  - d) Maintains good behavioral standing at the institution, as determined by the appropriate public postsecondary segment.
- 2) Stipulates that a student cannot have the student's mandatory systemwide tuition or fees waived in excess of the equivalent of two years of attendance in an undergraduate program at the institution that the student attends.
- 3) Stipulates that a student who is eligible for a waiver of tuition or fees may receive a waiver for each academic year during which the student applies for that waiver, but an eligible student may not receive a waiver of tuition or fees for a prior academic year.
- 4) Specifies that the waiver of tuition or fees can apply only to a student who is determined to be a resident of California.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the UC as a public trust to be administered by the Regents of the UC; and, grants the Regents full powers of organization and government, subject only to such legislative control as may be necessary to insure security of its funds, compliance with the terms of its endowments, statutory requirements around competitive bidding and contracts, sales of property and the purchase of materials, goods and services (Article IX, Section (9)(a) of the California Constitution).
- 2) Establishes the CSU administered by the Board of Trustees, and provides that the Trustees shall have the full power over the construction and development of any CSU campus and any buildings or other facilities or improvements (Education Code (EC) Section 89030, et seq.).

- 3) Requires the campuses of the California Community Colleges (CCC) and the CSU and requests the UC, to place on their website a listing of systemwide fees and/or tuition waivers that are available to students, and requires the online posting to include:
  - a) A description, including eligibility requirements, of the systemwide fee or tuition waiver and a link to an application for the systemwide fee or tuition waiver on the campus webpage and the campuses' financial aid webpage (EC Section 68120.7).
- 4) Exempts from mandatory systemwide tuition or fees at the UC, CSU, and CCC any surviving spouse or child, of a deceased person, who met all of the following requirements:
  - a) The person was a resident of this state;
  - b) The person was employed by a state or local public agency, or was a contractor, or an employee of a contractor, performing services for a public agency, or was a firefighter employed by the federal government whose duty assignment involved performing firefighting services in California;
  - c) The person's principal duties consisted of active law enforcement service or active fire suppression and prevention; and,
  - d) The person was killed in the performance of active law enforcement or active fire suppression and prevention duties, died as a result of an accident or an injury caused by external violence or physical force during the performing those duties, or died as a result of an industrial injury or illness arising out of and in the course of performing those duties (EC Section 68120).
- 5) Exempts from mandatory systemwide tuition and fees at the UC, CSU, and CCC a student who is in an undergraduate program and who is the surviving dependent of any individual killed in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon building in Washington, DC, or the crash of United Airlines Flight 93 in southwestern Pennsylvania, if the student meets the financial need requirements set forth in Section 69432.7 for the Cal Grant A Program and either of the following apply:
  - a) The surviving dependent was a resident of California on September 11, 2001; and,
  - b) The individual killed in the attacks was a resident of California on September 11, 2001 (EC Section 68121).
- 6) Exempts from mandatory systemwide tuition or fees at the UC, CSU, and CCC any surviving spouse or child, of a deceased person, who met all of the following requirements:
  - a) The deceased person was a resident of this state;
  - b) The deceased person was a licensed physician or a licensed nurse employed by or under contract with a health facility regulated and licensed by the State Department of Public Health to provide medical services or a first responder employed to provide emergency services, as specified;

- c) The deceased person's principal duties consisted of providing medical services or emergency services during the COVID-19 pandemic state of emergency; and,
  - d) The deceased person died of COVID-19 during the COVID-19 pandemic state of emergency (EC Section 68120.3).
- 7) Exempts from mandatory systemwide tuition and fees at the UC, CSU, and CCC a student who has been exonerated if the student meets all of the following conditions:
- a) Completes and submits the Free Application for Federal Student Aid; and,
  - b) Meets the financial need requirements established for Cal Grant A awards (EC Section 69000).
- 8) Exempts from mandatory systemwide tuition and fees at the UC, CSU, and CCC any of the following:
- a) The dependent of any California resident killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks;
  - b) The dependent of veteran killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty, as specified; and,
  - c) Current and former foster youth, as specified (EC Section 66025.3 and Section 76300).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *Purpose of the measure.* According to the author, "Students should be motivated to participate in community service and should have the opportunity to pursue higher education without the burden of excessive debt. This bill incentivizes students who dedicate a year to public service by providing them with two years of [waived tuition and fees at a] University or a California State Institution without any financial burden."

*California Conservation Corps.* The California Conservation Corps is the oldest and largest conservation corps in the nation. Created in 1976 by Governor Jerry Brown, it was soon made a permanent state department under the umbrella of the California Natural Resources Agency. The California Conservation Corps mission is to protect and enhance California's natural resources and communities while empowering and developing young adults.

The California Conservation Corps is dedicated to transforming the lives of California's young adults, ages 18 to 25, and military veterans through age 29, through hard work, education and training; enabling them to earn meaningful skills and hands-on experience for launching a career and becoming assets to our communities. During their year of paid service (Corpsmembers receive a monthly stipend of \$2,814) to the State of California, Corpsmembers receive "basic" training called COMET (Corpsmember Orientation, Motivation Education and Training) which includes first aid, proper use of hand tools, water safety, roadside safety, and emergency response training, as well as effective communication techniques, sexual harassment and violence prevention, life skills, team-building, educational assessments, and more.

Corpsmembers also benefit from the California Conservation Corps specialized training and certification programs ranging from firefighting techniques to chain saw operation to food preparation to trail building. Young adults come from across California and represent the state’s rich ethnic diversity. To date, more than 120,000 Corpsmembers have participated in the California Conservation Corps, taking with them the skills, education and experience to become productive citizens of California.

*How many?* According to the California Conservation Corps, approximately 3,000 eligible individuals join the Corps each year. Of the estimated 3,000 individuals, 79% identify as male and 21% identify as female. For the current Fiscal Year (FY) (2023-24) there are 1,667 Corpsmembers. Committee Staff understands that once a Corpmember separates from the Corps, some will end up matriculating to an adult school or postsecondary education. The chart below, from the California Conservation Corps shows the number of Corpsmembers who have gone on to enroll in an adult school or California college or university:

	FY19/20	FY20/21	FY 21/22
Enrolled in Adult School <sup>A</sup>	53	82	158
Postsecondary education <sup>B</sup>	309	352	393
<b>TOTAL</b>	362	434	551

A: Number of Corpsmembers in cohort who, in the 12-month period following final separation from the Corps enrolled in an adult school or other precollegiate-level program. Data Source: Third-party generated, Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS)

B: Number of Corpsmembers in cohort who, in the 12-month period following final separation from the Corps, enrolled in postsecondary education. DATA SOURCE: Internal collection, analysis of C<sup>3</sup>data; self-reported, survey; third-party generated, California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO)

Committee Staff is not aware as to why this year’s cohort is well below the typical threshold of 3,000 Corpsmembers.

*#CaliforniansForAll College Corps.* College Corps is a statewide, paid service program, launched during the 2022-2023 academic year, which provides meaningful work to college students in exchange for serving their community. The program helps participants graduate on time and with less debt while gaining valuable work experience. Students will receive up to \$10,000 for completing up to 450 hours of community service.

On February 1, 2023, the Governor and the California Volunteers announced that applications were open for the first cohort of #CaliforniansForAll College Corps, which over 3,000 students from various colleges and universities in the State can participate during the 2023-24 academic year.

This measure appears to be somewhat duplicative of the Governor's #CaliforniansForAll College Corps.

*Committee comments.* This measure would waive up to two-years of UC and CSU tuition fees for eligible Corpsmembers, however, based on the data above, it remains unclear how many Corpsmembers, upon completion of the California Conservation Corps, matriculate directly to a UC or CSU. Further, the measure is silent as to how long a former Corpsmembers would be eligible to draw down on the tuition waiver. For example, would a Corpsmember be eligible if the Corpsmember separated two or more years after completing the California Conservation Corps?

*Moving forward, the author may wish to provide specificity as to the length of eligibility for a former Corpsmember to qualify for the tuition and fees waiver.*

Additionally, Committee Staff understands that Corpsmembers come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. As this measure is drafted all former Corpsmembers, regardless of their economic background, would be eligible for the waiver of tuition and fees.

*Moving forward the author may wish to consider implementing income limits in order to ensure that the Corpsmembers matriculating to a CSU or UC with the greatest financial need have priority in receiving the tuition and fees waiver.*

Based on data provided by the California Conservation Corps, it would appear that disaggregated demographic data reporting is warranted, in order to ensure that the program is not violating any discrimination law, like Title IX.

*Moving forward, the author may wish to disaggregated data reporting to this measure.*

*Prior legislation.* In recent years, there has been an increase in measures that allow, under unique and specified circumstances, students to be exempt from paying statewide tuition and fees. The list below does not include all of the measures.

- 1) AB 1113 (Medina), Chapter 569, Statutes of 2021, expands mandatory systemwide or campus-based tuition or fees at the CCC, CSU, and UC for any surviving spouse or child, of a licensed physician or a licensed nurse employed by a health facility regulated and licensed by the State Department of Public Health or as a first responder employed to provide emergency services who died of COVID-19.
- 2) AB 1090 (Medina), Chapter 516, Statutes of 2019, expands existing mandatory systemwide tuition and fee waivers at the CCC, CSU, and UC for qualifying surviving spouses and dependents of active duty law enforcement or firefighters to include mandatory campus-based fees.
- 3) AB 2164 (O'Donnell), Chapter 435, Statutes of 2016, expands existing systemwide tuition and fee waivers at the CCC, CSU, and UC for surviving spouses and dependents of active duty law enforcement or firefighters to include those who died as a result of an industrial injury or illness arising from work in law enforcement or fire suppression.

- 4) AB 1746 (Liu), Chapter 450, Statutes of 2002, establishes a tuition and fee waiver for qualifying surviving dependents and spouses, as defined of individuals killed in September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, or the crash of United Airlines Flight 93 in southwestern Pennsylvania.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

None on file.

**Opposition**

None on file.

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