

Date of Hearing:

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 255 (Alanis) – As Introduced January 19, 2023

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary education: priority registration for first responders

SUMMARY: Requires by July 1, 2024, for community college districts and the California State University (CSU) and requests the University of California (UC) to grant priority registration, if applicable, to students employed as first responders, as defined. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the CSU and community college districts, by July 1, 2024, to provide priority registration for students who are employed as first responders at campuses that offer priority registration to other students. Additionally, requires the campuses to apply the priority registration only to baccalaureate programs and certificate programs and to verify the employment of students who seek the priority registration established pursuant to the measure.
- 2) Requests the University of California, by July 1, 2024, to provide priority registration for students who are employed as first responders at campuses that offer priority registration to other students, to apply the priority to baccalaureate programs and certificate programs offered by the campuses, and to verify the employment of students who seek the priority registration authorized by the measure.
- 3) Defines first responder to include the occupations of; peace officers, firefighters, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, and public safety dispatchers or public safety telecommunicators.
- 4) Establishes, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this bill contains costs mandated by the state, the state shall reimburse the applicable entities.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the UC as a public trust to be administered by the Regents and grants the Regents full powers of organization and governance subject only to legislative control as necessary to ensure the security of funds, compliance with terms of its endowments, and the 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 system, made of 23 campuses, and bestows upon the CSU Trustees, through the Board of Trustees, the power, duties, and functions with respect to the management, administration, and control of the CSU system (Education Code (EDC) Section 66606 and 89030 et. seq.).
- 3) Establishes the California Community Colleges (CCC) under the administration of the Board of Governors of the CCC, as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in this state. The CCC shall be comprised of community college districts (EDC Section 70900).

- 4) Authorizes the CSU and each community college district, and requests the UC to offer priority registration for any existing or former member of the State Guard or a former member of the Armed Forces of the United States who is a California resident and has been honorably discharged, as defined (EDC Section 66025.8).
- 5) Authorizes the CSU and each community college district, and requests the UC to offer priority registration to foster youth, former foster youth, homeless youth, or formerly homeless youth, as defined (EDC Section 66025.9).
- 6) Requires each community college district to offer priority registration to students eligible for disabled student programs and services, students eligible for extended opportunity programs and services, students receiving CalWORKS, and students who receive Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families as defined (EDC Section 66025.91 and 66025.92).
- 7) Requires, beginning no later than July 1, 2023, each campus of the CSU, and each campus within a community college district, and requests each campus of the UC to offer priority registration to student parents. Encourages the CCC, the CSU, and the UC to utilize data from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, the California Dream Act Application, the application to receive a fee waiver at the CCC, and any campus form or document that identifies student parents. Student parents for purposes of priority enrollment are defined as a student who has a child or children under 18 years of age who will receive more than half of their support from the student (EDC Section 66025.81).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: *Need for the bill.* As expressed by the author, “AB 255 would provide first responders with better access to advance training and a pathway to degree attainment. AB 255 would also help offset the workforce shortage in some of California’s most vital industries, including law enforcement and healthcare, by providing employees with an educational incentive to remain in their jobs while pursuing postsecondary degrees and certificates.”

Priority registration at public higher education institutions. Per requirements delineated in the Education Code, the CCC and the CSU are required to provide priority registration to members or former members of the United States Armed Forces, members or former members of the State Guard, current or former foster youth, current or formerly homeless youth, and by July 1, 2023, students who identify as student-parents. The UC, though not required by law, to provide priority registration to the aforementioned student populations, has adopted resolutions requiring campuses that provide priority registration to also provide the student populations identified in Education Code with priority registration.

The UC Board of Regents has a systemwide policy that requires campuses to provide priority registration to student-athletes due to the athlete’s unique training and traveling schedule during their athletic season (Policy 3501). Additional populations who receive priority registration differ from campus to campus, as the choice to provide additional student groups with priority registration is delegated to the campus. For example, UCLA permits students with disabilities to receive priority registration as part of their accommodations, and students who are employed by the campus in specific positions also qualify for priority registration.

The CSU systemwide policy 13057384 outlines the statutory required priority registration as Tier one or the first group of students who will receive the opportunity to register prior to their peers.

Any other populations of students provided priority enrollment must come after the Tier one populations and are granted priority enrollment on a campus-by-campus basis. The authority for establishing a registration priority system beyond what is stipulated in the Education Code resides with the President of the CSU campus according to the California Code of Regulation Title 5, Section 40106. For example, in April 2019 President Nelson of California State University, Sacramento issued a policy regarding a priority registration system that included the statutory requirements and also provided priority registration for additional student populations, including disabled students. According to the Chancellor's Office of the CSU, priority registration is provided at all CSU campuses to students who participate in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids (CalWORKs) program, students who receive Tribal TANF funds, and students who participate in the CSU California Promise (SB 412 (Glazer), Chapter 436, Statute of 2016).

The CCC is required in Education Code to offer additional priority registration to students who participate in Extended Opportunity Programs and Service programs (EOPS), disabled students (DSP), and students who participate in the CalWORKs program. According to the CCC Chancellor's Office, community college districts can also add additional groups of students who can receive priority registration. Athletes, graduating/transferring students, students who participate in TRIO Programs, Puente Project, MESA, UMOJA, and students who participate in Student Success programs (those who attend orientation) or in the California Promise program are also granted priority registration.

Due to the increase in student populations who receive priority enrollment, the CCC has adopted regulations around the order in which priority registration will be provided. Specifically, the California Code of Regulations under Title 5, section 5, arranges the multitude of priority registrations offered by the CCC into three groups: Tier 1 or statutorily required priority registration, Tier 2 or other priority registrations the community college system has adopted, and Tier 3 or the priority registration provided to students on a district by district basis. The second tier of students who receive priority enrollment include those who are continuing with their education and are not on academic probation and first-time students who have completed orientation and have developed a student education plan.

Neither the UC nor the CSU maintains data on who receives priority registration at the systemwide level. According to the California Community College Data Mart, the following groups of students would qualify for priority enrollment in the fall of 2022: 16,518, foster youth or former foster youth; 7,816, current or formerly homeless youth; 10,139 CalWORKs recipients; 57,057 DSPS students; 55,280 EOPS students; and 27,481 current or former members of the Armed Forces or State Guard.

Staffing shortages for first responders. According to the California Employment Development Department, staffing shortages for first responders as defined by AB 255 (Alanis) include as follows:

- Public Safety Dispatchers – 7,220 openings;
- Paramedics and Emergency Technicians – 13,570 openings;
- Fire Fighters – 24,740 openings; and,

- Police Officers – 54,560 openings.

With the California Employment Development Department and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projecting an increase in workforce demands over the next ten years for first responders, neither agency contained data as to why the shortages are occurring nor did the agencies identify remedies to decrease the workforce shortage. An examination of local and national newspapers confirms that various factors have contributed to the mass exodus of first responders from their chosen field. Factors run the gamut from climate change causing elongated fire seasons to growing social distrust in the health and public safety system. In February 2021, the Public Policy Institute of California issued a fact sheet on law enforcement staffing that found California currently has 2,000 fewer law enforcement officers than it did before the Great Recession. In 2021, the American Ambulance Association sent a letter to the U.S. Congress beseeching Congress to hold hearings into the vast workforce shortage crisis experienced by emergency medical services throughout the nation. The letter found overall turnover among paramedics and EMTs ranges from 20-30% annually, with some ambulance services experiencing 100% turnover in a four-year period. One method of recruiting individuals into a specific occupation is to offer incentives beyond wages. AB 255 (Alanis) seeks to provide this incentive by providing priority enrollment for first responders who seek additional education while on the job.

Becoming a first responder. Due to the broad definition of first responder, there are copious pathways by which an individual could fulfill the educational and licensing requirements to acquire an occupation defined as a first responder. The majority of educational requirements required of a first responder can be completed at California Community Colleges through their vocational and occupational training programs. For example, Ventura College offers an associate degree of science in paramedic studies, Shasta College offers various degrees in firefighting through their fire academy, and Imperial Valley College has a post-certification program offered on campus to perspective police candidates.

The chart below identifies the basic educational requirements for three “first responder” occupations based on data collected by the Employment Development Department and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for California.

<u>Position</u>	<u>Age/Educational Requirement</u>
Fire Fighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Medical Technician Certification • Be 18 to 21 years of age depending on local requirements • High School Diploma • Complete a regional fire academy training program
Peace Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Certificate, complete a POST-certified training program • Be at least 21 years of age • High School Diploma [for now]

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • California Highway Patrol prefers an associate degree • Potentially additional Academy training depending on the type of officer.
<p>Paramedic and Emergency Medical Technician</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Diploma • Complete either an EMT-1, EMT – 2 or EMT Paramedic training program • Licensure from the California Emergency Medical Service Authority

However, after completing the minimum qualifications for being a first responder, many of the occupations identified require ongoing education in order to maintain licensure or require additional training/education to obtain promotions in the field. To renew their licenses in California, a paramedic must complete 48 hours of continuing education every few years. In *Policing around the Nation: Education, Philosophy, and Practice*, a research report conducted by Christie Gardiner, Ph.D. in collaboration with the Police Foundation, it was found that while the vast majority of policing agencies require a high school diploma for entry, a college degree is highly important when applying for a promotion. More than half of the agencies surveyed included incentives for officers to pursue higher education, including higher pay based on collective bargaining agreements. One of the barriers preventing first responders from pursuing postsecondary degree opportunities while begin employed is the constraint of finding courses that accommodate the first responder’s work schedule. AB 255 (Alanis) seeks to remedy this by providing an incentive for first responders to pursue a higher education degree by granting this population with priority registration to ensure exposure to the maximum amount of course diversity.

Arguments in support. As enumerated by the California State Sheriffs’ Association, “there have been lengthy policy discussions in recent years pertaining to the training and education of California’s peace officers. Additionally, enhanced education requirements related to college level course work will soon be in place for peace officer candidates. AB 255 would require the California State University and community college districts, and request University of California campuses, with priority enrollment systems, to grant first priority registration for enrollment to first responders. CSSA is pleased to support AB 255.”

Committee comments. With a vast number of student categories already receiving priority registration, a question must be postulated as to whether priority registration has any value if a myriad of students receive the privilege. To assess the validity of the claim, one would question how many students are currently receiving priority enrollment compared to the total population of students at a given system. The CCC enrolls the largest population of students in California; and therefore, has the largest population of students receiving priority enrollment. In fall 2022, the total number of students who identified as being one of the six legislatively required populations for priority enrollment was 174,291 out of 1,267,628 or 13.7% of the student population. If one were to add the projected number of student parents, based on the March 2021 UC Davis Wheelhouse Study from the Center on Community College Leadership and Research on Student Parents, the total percentage would increase to 27.1%. While it is impossible to

predict the number of first responders who would take advantage of the priority registration opportunity, one could argue the population of priority enrollment could dramatically increase, or because these students would be older and potentially already student parents there could be overlap with existing priority enrollment categories.

AB 255 (Alanis) is narrow in scope as it requires priority registration be provided to first responders who are seeking additional higher education opportunities while they are employed. Most higher education programs are not tailored to fit a student who is employed in a high-risk, long-hour demanding job. Encouraging students to obtain higher education in pursuit of higher wages and removing barriers to degree attainment is a priority of this Legislature and AB 255 (Alanis) aligns with these goals.

Previous Legislation.

AB 2881 (Berman), Chapter 935, Statutes of 2023, required the CCC and the CSU, and requests the UC to provide students with information on the California Special Supplemental Food Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC), as defined; to grant priority registration to student parents, as defined; and to create a website with resources for student parents.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California State Sheriffs' Association
1 individual

Opposition

None on file.

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