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California Student Aid Commission, Assembly Higher Education Leaders announce Cal Grant Modernization Bill AB 1456 to simplify, streamline financial aid, reach more students

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Tues., Feb. 23, 2021 – The California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) and Assemblymembers Jose Medina and Kevin McCarty today released details of AB 1456, legislation to create a Cal Grant Equity Framework that will better meet the financial needs of California’s college students by simplifying, streamlining and expanding eligibility.

“For too long, California’s financial aid system has excluded too many students,” said Assemblymember Jose Medina (D-Riverside) and AB 1456 author. “In the midst of a pandemic that has exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities, it is critical that we modernize and reform Cal Grant’s framework to reflect the needs and students of the 21st century. AB 1456 will introduce a new path for college affordability in California.”

AB 1456 will streamline and simplify the current Cal Grant system making California’s financial aid system more accessible to students who need support the most, including low income students, student-parents, and returning learners. Under the new proposal, Cal Grant awards will reach nearly 200,000 more students and will be restructured to better meet students’ needs while maintaining existing levels of support for middle-class families.

“Cal Grant modernization is desperately needed,” said Assemblymember Kevin McCarty (D-Sacramento), Chair of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance and the AB 1456 principal co-author. “AB 1456 will put forth a new financial aid framework aimed to address inequities caused by COVID-19 and put student needs at the center of all college affordability discussions.”

“As principal coauthor of AB 1456, I firmly believe that California must expand access to financial aid in order for our students to be successful,” said Senator Connie M. Leyva (D-Chino), Chair of the Senate Education Committee. “By modernizing Cal Grants under this measure, we will establish an approach to state financial aid that reflects the evolving needs of today’s students.”

In an effort to coordinate available resources to eligible aid recipients, the updated financial aid system will also enable students receiving state aid to access other basic needs benefits, such as CalFresh, so that students can get regular meals.

“COVID-19 is truly the inequality virus as it has exposed a long-standing equity and access crisis in California’s higher education system,” said CSAC’s Executive Director Marlene Garcia. “AB 1456 will help our state address students’ basic needs right away while providing solutions to the larger puzzle of making California more equitable for generations to come.”

Since the onset of the pandemic, over 7 in 10 of California college students have lost some or all of their income, CSAC’s [May 2020 COVID-19 student survey](#) reported. As California looks ahead to economic recovery and building a strong workforce, AB 1456 is crucial to keeping students on track to achieve their higher education and career goals.

“California cannot afford to leave our students behind due to the pandemic,” says David Rattray, President and CEO of UNITE-LA. “Our business community depends on a strong pipeline of college students to help our economy recover, and AB 1456 supports that pipeline.”

Support for the proposal introduced in the State Assembly on Friday, Feb. 19, includes the Campaign for College Opportunity, Ed Trust West, and the Fix Financial Aid Coalition of student organizations across California colleges and universities.

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The California Student Aid Commission administers the state’s \$2.8 billion portfolio of student financial aid programs and services, including the Cal Grant, the Middle Class Scholarship, and the California Dream Act Application. The Commission serves as a resource for policymakers and the public on college affordability and financing issues, and advocates for policy changes to eliminate cost as a barrier to any qualified California student pursuing a higher education. Visit our website at <https://www.csac.ca.gov> or follow us on Twitter @castudentaid.