

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2661

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 2, 2022

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 2661 with committee amendments.

As amended, this bill establishes the New Jersey Educator Scholarship Program in the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA), in coordination with the Department of Education. The purpose of the scholarship program is to provide incentives for students to pursue careers in education.

Scholarships would be annually awarded by HESAA to 50 students enrolled full time in an educator preparation program at an institution of higher education. Each student would receive a scholarship in an amount up to the remaining amount of tuition that is not covered by State, federal, or any other need-based grant or merit scholarship, for up to 18 credits for each semester of study. A scholarship, however, would not exceed the average in-State tuition amount charged by the four-year public institutions of higher education in the academic year in which the scholarship is awarded. A student would also receive an annual stipend of \$5,000 annually. A student would be eligible for the scholarship and stipend for four years of study or until the student receives a bachelor's degree and completes an educator preparation program, whichever occurs first.

The bill requires, within the first five full years after graduation, a student scholarship recipient to seek and accept full time employment as a teaching staff member with a public school district, charter school, or renaissance school in the State. The student would serve in employment with a public school for no less than three full school years, during which time the student would receive mentoring coordinated by the school in consultation with the Department of Education.

In order to be eligible for a scholarship under the program, a student is required to be a United States citizen, an eligible noncitizen, or meet certain other statutory requirements to be eligible for State financial aid. The department may establish additional eligibility requirements and minimum qualifications, and will determine an application and evaluation process for scholarship candidates. A student's scholarship would remain in effect provided that the student achieves satisfactory academic progress

and continues to meet eligibility requirements. The scholarship would not remain in effect for a student who: is dismissed from the program of study for academic or disciplinary reasons, is disqualified from employment by a school district due to the detection of criminal history record information under current law, becomes ineligible to receive a certificate of eligibility with advanced standing for any other reason, does not receive a degree within the first four years of the scholarship, withdraws from the program of study due to illness or a family emergency, or does not complete the required three full years of employment in a public school district within five years of receiving a bachelor's degree. Under certain circumstances, a student whose scholarship has been terminated may be required to repay as a debt to the State all or part of the amount of any stipend and the value of any scholarship received during the scholarship.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to house the program within HESAA, in coordination with the Department of Education. The committee amendments remove reference to high-achieving students. The amendments revise all references to tuition waiver to a scholarship in an amount up to the remaining amount of tuition that is not covered by State, federal, or any other need-based grant or merit scholarship, up to 18 credits for each semester of study. Under the amendments, the amount of a scholarship would not exceed the average in-State tuition amount charged by the four-year public institutions of higher education in the academic year in which the scholarship is awarded.

The committee amendments permit a student who received a scholarship under the program to seek and accept full time employment as a teaching staff member in a charter school or renaissance school, in addition to a public school district, as a requirement for the receipt of the scholarship. During the minimum three years in which a scholarship recipient is required to be employed as a teaching staff member following graduation, the amendments require a hiring district or school to provide mentoring in consultation with the Department of Education. The amendments also provide that the mentoring would be in addition to any current minimum requirements for mentoring established pursuant to State law or regulation.

The committee amendments also make changes to the eligibility criteria for a scholarship under the program. The amendments provide that a student is required to be a United States citizen or an eligible noncitizen or meet certain other statutory requirements to be eligible for State financial aid. The amendments specify that a student is required to be enrolled full time in an educator preparation program. The amendments provide that, as part of HESAA's authority under the bill to establish additional program eligibility requirements and

minimum qualifications, the authority may limit the program to students seeking degrees in math, science, special education, world languages, bilingual education, or other subjects determined to be in high demand for teachers by the Department of Education.

The committee amendments require a scholarship recipient who does not meet the minimum teaching service requirements of the bill to repay the amount of any stipend and the value of any scholarship received under the program as a debt to the State. Lastly, the amendments provide that the State will appropriate funds to finance scholarships, in addition to stipends, for participating students.