

CHAPTER 4

AN ACT establishing the “College Affordability Study Commission.”

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. a. There is established a College Affordability Study Commission for the purpose of examining issues and developing recommendations to increase the affordability of higher education in New Jersey. The commission shall consist of 10 members appointed as follows:

(1) the Governor shall appoint two members including the president of a public research university, or a designee, and the president of a State college or university established pursuant to chapter 64 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, or a designee;

(2) the President of the Senate shall appoint four members including the president of a county college, or a designee, one member of the faculty of a public institution of higher education in the State, appointed upon the joint recommendation of the American Association of University Professors, the New Jersey Education Association, and AFT New Jersey, and two public members, one upon the recommendation of the Minority Leader of the Senate; and

(3) the Speaker of the General Assembly shall appoint four members including the president of an independent institution of higher education, or a designee, one student who is enrolled in a public institution of higher education in the State, and two public members, one upon the recommendation of the Minority Leader of the General Assembly.

b. Appointments to the commission shall be made within 30 days of the effective date of this act. Vacancies in the membership of the commission shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments were made.

c. Members of the commission shall serve without compensation but shall be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties within the limits of funds made available to the commission for its purposes.

2. a. The commission shall organize as soon as practicable, but no later than 30 days following the appointment of the members. The commission shall choose a chairperson from among its members and shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the commission.

b. The Office of Legislative Services shall provide such staff and related support services as the commission requires to carry out its work. The commission also shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State, county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as it may require and as may be available to it for its purposes.

3. It shall be the duty of the College Affordability Study Commission to study issues related to increasing the affordability of higher education in the State including:

a. The creation of an Accelerated Degree Pilot Program which would offer high performing high school students interested in pursuing a medical degree or graduate-level science or engineering degree the opportunity of receiving that degree earlier than would be possible under a traditional program;

b. The creation of an Affordable Degree Pilot Program which would permit students to earn a baccalaureate degree at a discounted tuition rate through a degree program partnership between a county college and a four-year public institution of higher education, with the student completing the first two years of the program at the participating county college;

c. The creation of a Pay It Forward Pilot Program which would replace the current system of charging students tuition and fees for enrollment at public institutions of higher education and allow students to instead pay back a percentage of their income for a certain number of years;

d. Methods to increase the performance of the New Jersey Better Educational Savings Trust (NJBEST), N.J.S.18A:71B-35 et seq., including, but not limited to: setting specific high standards for the selection of the investment manager to ensure that the program is ranked nationally as one of the best based on rate of return, expense ratios, and other relevant criteria; improving investment options available to the investor, such as options that permit customers more flexibility to customize their portfolios; determining possible alternatives to the NJBEST Scholarship, such as an annual State matching amount per beneficiary without the requirement of the beneficiary attending a State institution of higher education; and allowing a gross income tax deduction for amounts contributed to NJBEST accounts;

e. Changes to the New Jersey College Loans to Assist State Students (NJCLASS) Loan Program, N.J.S.18A:71C-21 et seq., that will increase disclosure and make the program more consumer-friendly for student and parent borrowers including, but not limited to: advertisement of the Annual Percentage Rate for NJCLASS loans in addition to the interest rate; options for a borrower to choose either a co-signer or guarantor on a loan; an option for deferred loan payment of principal and interest while in school with a 10-15 year repayment period; and NJCLASS loan consolidation interest rates that more closely reflect market conditions; and

f. Any other proposals that the commission believes would increase the affordability of higher education in the State.

4. The commission shall issue a report of its findings and recommendations concerning the study described in section 3 of this act, to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the General Assembly, no later than 18 months after the commission organizes.

5. This act shall take effect immediately, and the commission shall expire 30 days after the submission of its report.

Approved February 5, 2015.