

ASSEMBLY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY CONCURRENT RESOLUTION No. 54

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 3, 2022

The Assembly Higher Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 54.

The Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program, established by State law in 1968, supports educationally and economically disadvantaged students for undergraduate and graduate study at public and private institutions of higher education in New Jersey. The EOF program, in part, provides direct financial aid to students through Opportunity Grants, which assist students in meeting college expenses, such as fees, books, room, board, and transportation, that are not covered by the State's Tuition Aid Grant program.

Current EOF regulations specify that institutions are to award Opportunity Grant funds to students in the following priority order: 1) renewal students who were given awards during the previous academic year; 2) first-time, full-time freshmen; 3) EOF transfer students who received an EOF student grant at another institution, in the preceding academic year; 4) renewal students readmitted or returning to the program who did not receive awards in the prior academic year; and 5) eligible students who do not fall into any of the other four categories. Under this structure, a high school graduate who has, for example, earned an associate degree through participation in a dual enrollment program is not considered a "first-year student" and is thus placed in the lowest EOF funding priority level as opposed to being considered in the second funding priority level if the student had not attained an associate degree. The structure creates a disincentive for students to participate in dual enrollment and other college readiness programs that the Legislature and several administrations have strived to establish and encourage.

This resolution urges the Secretary of Higher Education and the Educational Opportunity Fund Board of Directors, who respectively administer and govern the program, to study and modernize current EOF regulations, specifically regulations that negatively impact students who have earned 24 or more college credits while in high school. Dual enrollment programs allow high schools to partner with an institution of higher education to offer coursework that can be applied toward completion of a postsecondary degree.

This bill was pre-filed for introduction in the 2020-2021 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.

As reported by the committee, this bill is identical to Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 44, which was also reported by the committee on this same date.