SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2743

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: OCTOBER 19, 2020

The Senate Higher Education Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 2743 with committee amendments.

As amended, this bill establishes the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) Program, which is to be administered by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. The purpose of the program is to provide last-dollar grants to eligible county college students, to pay for the remaining costs of tuition and approved educational fees, subject to the limit of funds appropriated or otherwise made available for the program, that are not already covered by any other State, federal, and institutional need-based grants and merit scholarships for which a grant recipient is eligible. The program would also provide county colleges with Student Success Incentive funding for outreach and student success initiatives.

To be eligible for grants under the CCOG program, a student is required to: be a legal resident of the State or, for undocumented students, be eligible for student financial aid pursuant to P.L.2018, c.12 (C.18A:71B-2.1); be enrolled in at least six credits at a county college in the State; be enrolled at the county college that serves the student's county of residence, although a student attending an out-of-county college may receive a grant to cover tuition and approved educational fees charged at the in-district rate for the student's home county college; have an annual adjusted gross income between $0 and $65,000, except that the authority, in consultation with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, may annually establish maximum annual adjusted gross income eligibility limits of no less than $65,000; have applied for all other available forms of State, federal, and institutional need-based grants and merit scholarships and completed and submitted a financial aid form; not owe a refund on a grant or scholarship previously received from a State or federal program through any institution or be in default on any loan made under any State or federal student loan program at any institution, unless the student makes arrangements with the authority to repay the debt; and be in good academic standing and

meet the minimum standards for academic performance and satisfactory academic progress as defined by the county college which the student is attending.

A student will be eligible for a grant under the program for up to five semesters, unless the student is enrolled in a program regularly requiring at least six semesters for completion, in which case the authority will permit up to six semesters of eligibility. A student enrolled in a three plus one degree program will be eligible for a grant under the program for up to six semesters.

The bill also directs the Legislature to annually appropriate funds to the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) to provide Student Success Incentive funding to each county college for outreach and student success initiatives and to support the goals of the Community College Opportunity Grant Program. The funding may be used to fund initiatives, such as establishing mentorship programs; hosting events to assist students and families in completing financial aid applications; specify that and addressing students' material hardships, such as lack of access to food, medical care, housing, child care, and transportation.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to:

1. clarify that grants awarded under the Community College Opportunity Grant Program to cover the costs of approved educational fees are subject to the limit of funds appropriated or otherwise made available for the program; and

2. specify how the program funding will be distributed. As amended, the Secretary of Higher Education is authorized to retain up to five percent of the funding for grant administration activities designed to increase the effectiveness of the program. Fifty percent of the remaining appropriation will be distributed equally among all of the county colleges, while the other fifty percent of the remaining appropriation will be distributed based on the total number of students at each county college who received awards under the program during the previous academic year.

As reported by the committee, this bill is identical to Assembly Bill No. 4410(1R).