



General Assembly

***Substitute Bill No. 6885***

*January Session, 2025*



***AN ACT EXPANDING THE DEBT-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 10a-174 of the general statutes is repealed and the  
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

3 (a) As used in this section:

4 (1) "Award" means the greater of: (A) The unpaid portion, if any, of a  
5 qualifying student's eligible institutional costs after subtracting [his or  
6 her] such student's financial aid, or (B) a minimum award of five  
7 hundred dollars for a full-time student or three hundred dollars for a  
8 part-time student;

9 (2) "Eligible institutional costs" means the tuition and required fees  
10 incurred each semester by an individual student that are established by  
11 the Board of Regents for Higher Education for the [regional community-  
12 technical colleges] Connecticut State Community College;

13 (3) "Financial aid" means the sum of all scholarships, grants and  
14 federal, state and institutional aid received by a qualifying student.  
15 "Financial aid" does not include any federal, state or private student  
16 loans received by a qualifying student;

17 (4) "Qualifying student" means any person who (A) graduated from  
18 a public or nonpublic high school, (B) enrolls as a full-time or part-time  
19 student for [the fall semester of 2020, or any] a semester [thereafter,] at  
20 [a regional community-technical college] the Connecticut State  
21 Community College in a program leading to a degree or certificate, (C)  
22 is classified as an in-state student pursuant to section 10a-29, (D) is  
23 making satisfactory academic progress while enrolled at [a regional  
24 community-technical college] the Connecticut State Community  
25 College, (E) has completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid,  
26 and (F) has accepted all available financial aid or is a transition program  
27 student;

28 (5) "Full-time student" means a student who is enrolled at [a regional  
29 community-technical college] the Connecticut State Community  
30 College and (A) is carrying twelve or more credit hours in a semester,  
31 or (B) has a learning disability documented with the [regional  
32 community-technical college in which he or she is enrolled] college and  
33 is enrolled in the maximum number of credit hours that is feasible for  
34 such student to attempt in a semester, as determined by such student's  
35 academic advisor;

36 (6) "Semester" means the fall or spring semester of an academic year.  
37 "Semester" does not include a summer semester or session;

38 (7) "Part-time student" means a student who is enrolled at [a regional  
39 community-technical college] the Connecticut State Community  
40 College and is carrying not less than six but fewer than twelve credit  
41 hours in a semester; and

42 (8) "Transition program student" means any person who (A) is a  
43 resident of this state, (B) has not graduated from high school, (C) is  
44 enrolled in a transition program pursuant to such person's  
45 individualized education program, and (D) enrolls in one or more  
46 courses at [a regional community-technical college] the Connecticut  
47 State Community College.

48 (b) The Board of Regents for Higher Education shall (1) establish a

49 debt-free community college program to make awards to qualifying  
50 students each semester, (2) adopt rules, procedures and forms necessary  
51 to implement the debt-free community college program, and (3) submit  
52 a report outlining such rules, procedures and forms, in accordance with  
53 the provisions of section 11-4a, to the joint standing committee of the  
54 General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to higher  
55 education. Awards made to qualifying students pursuant to the debt-  
56 free community college program shall be designated as the "Mary Ann  
57 Handley Award".

58 (c) For the fall semester of 2020, and each semester thereafter, the  
59 Board of Regents for Higher Education shall make awards to qualifying  
60 students within available appropriations. An award shall be available  
61 to a qualifying student for the first seventy-two credit hours earned by  
62 the qualifying student at [a regional community-technical college] the  
63 Connecticut State Community College, provided the qualifying student  
64 meets and continues to meet the requirements of this section. The board  
65 shall not use an award to supplant any financial aid, including, but not  
66 limited to, state or institutional aid, otherwise available to a qualifying  
67 student.

68 (d) Not later than November 1, 2024, and March 1, 2025, and each  
69 semester thereafter, the Board of Regents for Higher Education shall  
70 report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a, to the joint  
71 standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of  
72 matters relating to higher education and employment advancement and  
73 appropriations and the budgets of the state agencies regarding the debt-  
74 free community college program, including, but not limited to, (1) the  
75 number of qualifying students enrolled at the [regional community-  
76 technical colleges] Connecticut State Community College during each  
77 semester, (2) the number of qualifying students receiving minimum  
78 awards and the number of qualifying students receiving awards for the  
79 unpaid portion of eligible institutional costs, (3) the average number of  
80 credit hours the qualifying students enrolled in each semester and the  
81 average number of credit hours the qualifying students completed each  
82 semester, (4) the average amount of the award made to qualifying

83 students under this section for the unpaid portion of eligible  
84 institutional costs, and (5) the completion rates of qualifying students  
85 receiving awards under this section by degree or certificate program.

86       Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2025*) (a) As used in this section:

87       (1) "Award" means the greater of: (A) The unpaid portion, if any, of a  
88 qualifying student's eligible institutional costs after subtracting such  
89 student's financial aid, or (B) a minimum award of five hundred dollars  
90 for a full-time student or three hundred dollars for a part-time student;

91       (2) "Eligible institutional costs" means the tuition and required fees  
92 incurred each semester by an individual student that are established by  
93 the Board of Regents for Higher Education for the Connecticut State  
94 University System and by the Board of Trustees of The University of  
95 Connecticut for The University of Connecticut;

96       (3) "Financial aid" means the sum of all scholarships, grants and  
97 federal, state and institutional aid received by a qualifying student.  
98 "Financial aid" does not include any federal, state or private student  
99 loans received by a qualifying student;

100       (4) "Qualifying student" means any person who (A) participated in  
101 the debt-free community college program established pursuant to  
102 section 10a-174 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, and  
103 completed not fewer than sixty credits through said program at the  
104 Connecticut State Community College, (B) enrolls as a full-time or part-  
105 time student for the fall semester of 2025, or any semester thereafter, at  
106 a state university within the Connecticut State University System or The  
107 University of Connecticut in a program leading to a bachelor's degree,  
108 (C) is classified as an in-state student pursuant to section 10a-29 of the  
109 general statutes, (D) made satisfactory academic progress while  
110 enrolled at the Connecticut State Community College and continues to  
111 make satisfactory academic progress while enrolled at such state  
112 university or The University of Connecticut, (E) has completed the Free  
113 Application for Federal Student Aid, and (F) has accepted all available  
114 financial aid;

115 (5) "Full-time student" means a student who is enrolled at a state  
116 university within the Connecticut State University System or The  
117 University of Connecticut and (A) is carrying twelve or more credit  
118 hours in a semester, or (B) has a learning disability documented with  
119 such university in which he or she is enrolled and is enrolled in the  
120 maximum number of credit hours that is feasible for such student to  
121 attempt in a semester, as determined by such student's academic  
122 advisor;

123 (6) "Semester" means the fall or spring semester of an academic year.  
124 "Semester" does not include a summer semester or session; and

125 (7) "Part-time student" means a student who is enrolled at a state  
126 university within the Connecticut State University System or The  
127 University of Connecticut and is carrying not less than six but fewer  
128 than twelve credit hours in a semester.

129 (b) The Board of Regents for Higher Education and the Board of  
130 Trustees of The University of Connecticut shall, jointly, (1) establish a  
131 finish line scholars program to make awards to qualifying students each  
132 semester, (2) adopt rules, procedures and forms necessary to implement  
133 the finish line scholars program, and (3) submit a report outlining such  
134 rules, procedures and forms, in accordance with the provisions of  
135 section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of  
136 the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to higher  
137 education.

138 (c) For the fall semester of 2025, and each semester thereafter, the  
139 Board of Regents for Higher Education and the Board of Trustees of The  
140 University of Connecticut shall each make awards to qualifying  
141 students within available appropriations. An award shall be available  
142 to a qualifying student for the first seventy-two credit hours earned by  
143 the qualifying student at a state university within the Connecticut State  
144 University System or The University of Connecticut, as applicable, or  
145 until such qualifying student earns a bachelor's degree, whichever is  
146 earlier, provided the qualifying student meets and continues to meet the

147 requirements of this section. The board shall not use an award to  
148 supplant any financial aid, including, but not limited to, state or  
149 institutional aid, otherwise available to a qualifying student.

150 (d) Not later than November 1, 2025, and March 1, 2026, and each  
151 semester thereafter, the Board of Regents for Higher Education and the  
152 Board of Trustees of The University of Connecticut shall each report, in  
153 accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes,  
154 to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having  
155 cognizance of matters relating to higher education and employment  
156 advancement and appropriations and the budgets of the state agencies  
157 regarding the finish line scholars program, including, but not limited to,  
158 (1) the number of qualifying students enrolled at a state university  
159 within the Connecticut State University System or The University of  
160 Connecticut, as applicable, during each semester, (2) the number of  
161 qualifying students receiving minimum awards and the number of  
162 qualifying students receiving awards for the unpaid portion of eligible  
163 institutional costs, (3) the average number of credit hours the qualifying  
164 students enrolled in each semester and the average number of credit  
165 hours the qualifying students completed each semester, (4) the average  
166 amount of the award made to qualifying students under this section for  
167 the unpaid portion of eligible institutional costs, and (5) the completion  
168 rates of qualifying students receiving awards under this section by  
169 degree program.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	July 1, 2025	10a-174
Sec. 2	July 1, 2025	New section

**HED** Joint Favorable Subst.

**APP** Joint Favorable