
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6885

AN ACT EXPANDING THE DEBT-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) and UConn's Board of Trustees to jointly establish a finish line scholars program awarding grants (within available appropriations) to students who received a Mary Ann Handley program award and then enroll in a bachelor's program at UConn or the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU).

Under this program, which must begin with the Fall 2025 semester, award amounts must be the same as under the Mary Ann Handley program (see BACKGROUND). This means that eligible students receive a grant equal to the greater of (1) the unpaid portion of a student's eligible institutional costs (tuition and required fees) after subtracting the student's financial aid, or (2) a minimum award of \$500 for a full-time student or \$300 for a part-time student. The award cannot be used to replace a student's financial aid and must be available until an eligible student earns, after enrolling at UConn or CSCU, (1) 72 credits or (2) a bachelor's degree, whichever comes first.

The Boards must create the program's rules, procedures, and forms and report on them to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. (Although the bill does not specify a deadline, presumably the report is due before the beginning of the Fall 2025 semester, when the program begins.)

The bill also requires the Boards to submit a report by November 1, 2025, March 1, 2026, and each following semester, to the Appropriations and Higher Education and Employment Advancement committees. As described below, this report must include information on participation

and degree completion rates, among other things.

The bill also makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

ELIGIBILITY FOR NEW PROGRAM

The bill's finish line scholars program is substantially similar to the Mary Ann Handley program, except it serves students who leave CT State and enroll at UConn or CSCU. Under the bill, to be eligible for the program, students must:

1. have participated in, and earned at least 60 credits through the Mary Ann Handley program at CT State;
2. enroll part- or full-time in a bachelor's degree-seeking program, in a fall or spring semester, at either a four-year institution within CSCU or at UConn;
3. qualify as in-state students;
4. have made satisfactory academic progress while enrolled at CT State and continue to make satisfactory academic progress while enrolled at CSCU or UConn;
5. have completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and
6. have accepted all available financial aid other than loans (i.e. scholarships, grants, and federal, state, and institutional aid.

REQUIRED SEMESTERLY REPORTING

Under the bill, the reports due November 1, 2025, March 1, 2026, and each following semester, must include the following information about program participants and awards:

1. the number of students (a) enrolled during each semester, (b) receiving minimum awards, and (c) receiving awards for the unpaid portion of eligible institutional costs, as well the average

- amount of those awards;
2. the average number of credit hours students (a) enrolled in each semester and (b) completed each semester; and
 3. student completion rates by degree program.

BACKGROUND

Mary Ann Handley Award

In 2019, the legislature required BOR to establish a tuition-free community college program, which is known as the Mary Ann Handley Award (formerly known as PACT). It is offered to certain high school graduates (or transition program students) who enroll as part or full-time CT State students. Award eligibility depends on a student's enrollment status, in-state student classification, and academic progress during matriculation.

By law, the program gives eligible students awards that are the greater of:

1. the unpaid portion of the tuition and required fees (i.e. tuition and fees after non-loan financial aid is applied) or
2. a minimum \$500 grant for full-time students or \$300 grant for part-time students.

Provided on a semester basis, the awards must apply to the first 72 credit hours earned by a student in a community college degree-granting or certificate program (CGS § 10a-174).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 13 Nay 5 (03/13/2025)