

RÉSUMÉ DIGEST

ACT 457 (SB 148)

2021 Regular Session

Cortez

Creates the M.J. Foster Promise Award Program to provide a financial award to an eligible student who enrolls in a qualified program at a two-year public postsecondary education institution or an accredited proprietary school licensed by the Board of Regents to pursue an associate degree or shorter-term postsecondary education credential required for certain high-demand, high-wage occupations aligned to Louisiana's workforce priorities.

Provides an award of up to \$3,200 per year to apply to the tuition and required fees of each award recipient enrolled full-time or an amount proportional to the hours enrolled if the recipient is enrolled part-time. Allows awards for students enrolled in qualified programs of less than a year duration to receive an award greater than \$3,200 but less than \$6,400. Caps the total award amount at \$6,400 per recipient.

Requires the award to be paid by the state to the two-year public postsecondary education institution or proprietary school on behalf of the award recipient. Further requires all other financial aid that the student qualifies for to be applied before the M.J. Foster Promise Award. Further requires, in order to receive the funding, two-year public postsecondary institutions or proprietary schools offering qualified programs to identify and provide a path for credentials earned to be stackable and transferable as academic credit.

Requires the Board of Regents to establish an advisory council to identify programs in which an eligible student may enroll to receive the award which shall be designated as "quality programs", including a review of the return on the state's investment in awards made to recipients who completed a qualified program. Delineates the process that the advisory council must use in designating qualified programs. Further requires the advisory council to identify and assist in the establishment of mechanisms to support award recipients to complete a qualified program and gain employment in the associated high-demand, high-wage jobs.

Provides that the advisory council is comprised of the following members or their designees:

- (1) The chancellor of LSU at Eunice.
- (2) The chancellor of Southern University at Shreveport.
- (3) The president of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.
- (4) The commissioner of higher education.
- (5) The state superintendent of education.
- (6) The secretary of the Department of Economic Development.
- (7) The executive director of the La. Workforce Commission (LWC).
- (8) The chairman of the La. Workforce Investment Council.
- (9) The secretary of the Department of Revenue (DOR).

Requires an applicant for the award must:

- (1) Be at least 21 years old.
- (2) Have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent or co-enroll in a qualified program and a program to earn a high school credential.
- (3) Be a citizen of the United States.
- (4) Be a Louisiana resident during the 24 months preceding the date of application.
- (5) Not have previously earned an undergraduate degree at the associate level or above.

- (6) Meet any admission requirements of the postsecondary education institution or proprietary school and the qualified program.
- (7) Have received an honorable discharge if previously served.
- (8)
 - (a) Not be incarcerated.
 - (b) Have no conviction for any crime of violence.
- (9) Have applied for federal student aid.
- (10) Provide the administering agency permission to collect and verify information relative to the success of the award program including information regarding the applicant's employment before and after receiving the award.
- (11) Agree to reside and work full-time in Louisiana for at least one year after the completion of the last semester that an award is provided.
- (12) Agree to annually perform, during each year that an award is received, at least 20 hours of community service or to participate for at least 20 hours in an apprenticeship, internship, or mentorship that is related to the qualified program.
- (13) Have a family income that does not exceed 300% of the applicable federal poverty guideline as published in the Federal Register by the United States Department of Health and Human Services or certify unemployment or underemployment for at least the six months prior to the receipt of the award.

Provides that to maintain an award the award recipient must:

- (1) Make steady academic progress unless provided an exception for cause by the administering agency.
- (2) Remain in good academic standing at the postsecondary education institution while enrolled in a qualified program.
- (3) Maintain continuous enrollment by earning at least one shorter-term postsecondary education or proprietary school credential per year or enrolling in the fall and spring semester of each academic year depending on the program in which enrolled.
- (4) Maintain a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.00 calculated on a 4.00 scale in a qualified program for which grades are issued.
- (5)
 - (a) Not be incarcerated.
 - (b) Have no conviction for any crime of violence.
- (6) Have received an honorable discharge if separation occurs after becoming a recipient of the award.
- (7) Have received the award for not more than three academic years.
- (8) Have used the award to earn not more than 60 hours of academic credit.
- (9) Certify the completion of at least 20 hours of community service or participation in an apprenticeship, internship, or mentorship for the prior calendar year.

Allows an award recipient who successfully completes a qualified program in less than three years to be eligible to continue to receive the award for any remaining time of eligibility by enrolling in another qualified program and continuing to meet all other eligibility requirements.

Allows an award recipient who previously received the award and enrolled in a program that is no longer a qualified program, to continue to use the award to continue in the program as long as all other continuing eligibility requirements are met.

Provides that the administering agency may seek, accept, and expend funds from any source, including private business, industry, foundations, and other groups, as well as any available federal or other governmental funding.

Provides that if the funding provided is not sufficient to fully fund all eligible award recipients, awards shall be provided to eligible students in the order that applications are received, with priority given to previous award recipients who have met all requirements for maintaining the award and who are continuing in a qualified program for which they previously received the award.

Creates the "M.J. Foster Promise Program Fund" into which monies received for the program will be deposited for exclusive use by the administering agency for purposes of the program. Allows unexpended and unencumbered monies in the fund at the end of the fiscal year to remain in the fund and be available for appropriation the next fiscal year.

Provides that the costs for administering and promoting the program shall be paid from the funds appropriated for the program and shall not exceed five percent of the monies received for the program.

Provides that implementation of the award is subject to the appropriation of state funds and limits the state appropriation to \$10 million per year for students enrolled in public postsecondary education institutions and \$500,000 per year for students enrolled in proprietary schools.

Provides for the program to be administered by the Board of Regents, through the office of student financial assistance (OSFA), and requires the administering agency to adopt rules and regulations in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act.

Requires OSFA to establish a working group to identify federal and state programs, including childcare supplements and other aid or services, that may provide additional support to award recipients to further their postsecondary education endeavors. Provides that the working group be composed of an appointee from each of the following:

- (1) The Department of Children and Family Services.
- (2) The Department of Health.
- (3) The State Department of Education.
- (4) The LWC.
- (5) The Department of Veterans Affairs.
- (6) The La. Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.
- (7) The OSFA.
- (8) The Department of Public Safety and Corrections.

Requires the administering agency to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the DOR and the LWC to share information relative to a taxpayer's reported income and employment information for purposes of generating data related to the success of award recipients in the workforce. Requires that any information shared or furnished shall be held confidential by the administering agency, shall be reported in the aggregate only, and shall contain no personally identifiable information for any award recipient.

Requires the administering agency to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Public Safety and Corrections to share information relative to a person's criminal history to determine award eligibility and to collect data relative to recidivism rates of award recipients.

Requires the administering agency to develop and implement a uniform information reporting system for the purposes of policy analysis and program evaluation. Additionally, requires an annual report to the legislature and provides that all information reported shall

be reported in the aggregate only and contain no personally identifiable information for any award recipient.

Effective upon signature of the governor (June 23, 2021).

(Adds R.S. 17:3047-3047.7)