



2021 Legislative Concept Proposal LC 595 - Funding for DDPSO Scholarships

Problem

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission administers a scholarship program for the qualified dependents of deceased or disabled public safety officers. Over time, the statutory authority to fund these recipients has eroded, and HECC requires new authority to issue these awards as envisioned.

Background

HECC administers the DDPSO grant program, established under ORS 348.270. The program provides state grant funds to the dependents of public safety officers who are injured or killed while in service to the public, in order to help those individuals defray the cost of attending a higher education institution in Oregon. This program was established in 1973 and initially operated by the standalone Oregon State Scholarship Commission (OSSC). For the upcoming academic year, we may award up to \$160,000 in grant funds based on current estimates.

When the program was established, as far as HECC can determine, state appropriations for financial aid were made generally and not to specific programs. Additionally, for most of the history of the program, ORS 348.230 provided the director of the OSSC (later the Oregon Student Assistance Commission or OSAC) with broad authority to determine which Oregon resident students would receive state grants. Finally, prior to being amended in 1999, ORS 348.260 stated in part, “In addition to any other form of student financial aid authorized by law, the Oregon Student Assistance Commission may award grants to qualified residents of this state.” This statute may have also provided broad authority to OSAC to make awards to DDPSO students.

However, beginning in 1999, the agency’s statutory authority to make awards to DDPSO students appears to have eroded. First, ORS 348.260 was amended to become the first iteration of the Oregon Opportunity Grant (OOG). Subsequent budget reports began to refer to funds that were appropriated in budget bills for “financial aid payments to individuals and institutions” (see 2001 SB 5542 as an example) as funding explicitly for the OOG. At the time, OSAC may have still relied on authority in ORS 348.230 in awarding DDPSO grants. In 2011, however, this statute was repealed.

The Legislature should have been notified at this time that no funding had been appropriated for the DDPSO program, and awards to students likely should have ceased for lack of agency authority to grant other funds.

Proposed Solution

The proposal restores HECC’s statutory authority to utilize OOG funds for DDPSO award recipients.