
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 537 (Ahrens) - Community colleges: California College Promise

Version: June 30, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: July 14, 2025

Policy Vote: ED. 6 - 1

Mandate: No

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill Summary: This bill would reduce the minimum unit requirement for California Community College (CC) students to qualify for a California College Promise fee waiver from 12 or more units (full-time) to 9 units.

Fiscal Impact:

- This bill could potentially result in additional, unknown Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures for community college districts to provide fee waivers to part-time students under the California College Promise Program. It is unclear how many part-time students taking 9 units that are not currently receiving a program fee waiver. However, the Chancellor's Office indicates that the bill does not require a community college district to provide fee waivers nor are they required to waive all fees.
- The Chancellor's Office estimates one-time Proposition 98 costs of between \$33,000 and \$86,000 statewide to develop and provide information to students regarding the benefits of full-time enrollment. This estimate assumes that all 115 colleges choose to grant fee waivers to students enrolled in 9 or more units. However, the exact costs would depend on the method used by the college to provide this information. The costs could also be lower to the extent that colleges use the most cost-effective method.

Background: Existing law establishes a per unit fee of \$46 for students attending a California community college. The law provides for a fee waiver for certain types of students, including those who meet minimum academic and progress standards adopted by the CCC Board of Governors (BOG) and have household incomes below certain thresholds established by the BOG or have demonstrated financial need pursuant to federal law.

Existing law establishes the California College Promise, under the administration of the Chancellor, to provide funding, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to each community college meeting prescribed requirements. The law authorizes a community college to use that funding to waive some or all of the fees for two academic years for first-time community college students and returning community college students, as defined, who are enrolled in 12 or more semester units or the equivalent, or less for students certified as "full time," as specified, and who complete and submit either a Free Application for Federal Student Aid or a California Dream Act Application, except as provided;

Existing law requires the Chancellor to establish a funding formula that advances the goals of the program, as specified.

Proposed Law: This bill reduces the minimum unit requirement for CCC students to qualify for a California College Promise fee waiver from 12 or more units to 9 units.

This bill defines “an eligible workload” to mean 9 or more semester units or the equivalent, and provides that a student enrolled in fewer than 9 units can be deemed to have an “eligible workload” at the discretion of the institution if the student has been certified as eligible, based on a commitment by the student that is analogous to an eligible workload, by a staff person in the disabled student services program at the college who is qualified to make a determination.

This bill prohibits any other student financial aid program from being referred to as the California College Promise.

This bill requires community colleges to provide written notification to a recipient of the California College Promise fee waiver, upon issuing the initial waiver to include the following:

1. A statement that eligibility for the California College Promise fee waiver is limited to a period of two academic years, as specified in EC 76396.3 (b)(1).
2. A description of the number of units a student needs to complete per semester or the quarter equivalent, or the number of semester units or the quarter units necessary per academic year, to complete an associate degree or certificate program within two academic years.
3. Information on how to access other financial aid opportunities available to students who have exceeded their two-year eligibility under the California College Promise fee waiver program.

Staff Comments: The existing California College Promise program allows but does not require community college districts to waive fees for full-time students (12 or more units per semester) for two academic years using funds that are provided for the program. Student applicants are not required to demonstrate financial need in order to qualify for a waiver. This bill removes the requirement that students must be enrolled full-time, and would instead establish a minimum enrollment of 9 units per semester. According to the author, “AB 537 improves opportunities for upward mobility in California. By expanding eligibility for fee waivers at California Community Colleges to include part-time students who are eligible, this bill aims to reduce financial barriers to higher education. As someone who has benefited from the community college system, I can personally attest to its ability to provide a pathway to success for disadvantaged populations. I am proud to sponsor a bill that will extend this opportunity to more individuals.”

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