

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 244 (Grayson) – As Amended May 23, 2025

Policy Committee: Higher Education

Vote: 10 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires beginning July 1, 2027, and upon appropriation by the Legislature, the Trustees of the California State University (CSU), and requests the Regents of the University of California (UC), to cover the costs of diagnostic assessments for learning disability assessments for the purposes of determining proof for academic accommodations for any student eligible for financial aid and financial assistance from the campus health or disability center.

The bill also provides for state funds to cover the annual cost of services on an actual-cost basis, with each CSU or UC campus responsible for documenting such costs to the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) to receive reimbursement.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Ongoing General Fund costs of an unknown but likely significant amount, possibly in the low millions of dollars, for the CSU to cover the costs of assessments as required by this bill. A precise estimate depends on the number of students that request an assessment. The cost of diagnostic assessments can also range depending on the type of evaluation from \$500 to \$2,500, which, according to the CSU, could result in a systemwide additional cost of approximately \$1.2 million each year. Further, if each CSU campus were to hire a learning disabilities specialist to administer the assessments, systemwide costs would be about \$2.5 million.
- 2) Ongoing General Fund cost pressures ranging from approximately \$1.3 million to \$5.8 million for the UC depending on the number of students requesting assessments and staff needed to administer at each campus.
- 3) Ongoing General Fund costs of approximately \$309,000 for the CSAC to hire two additional positions to support the expanded workload necessary to administer reimbursement of these costs to the institutions.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

Although students with disabilities in higher education are protected by state, federal, and local laws, they continue to face significant financial and logistical barriers to academic success. Diagnostic

assessments can cost thousands of dollars, leaving many students unable to access needed accommodations. SB 244 expands the Legislature's commitment to educational equity by ensuring that students with disabilities are not financially burdened when seeking the assessments necessary to access academic accommodations.

- 2) **Background. *Prevalence of Disabilities in Higher Education.*** According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 21% of undergraduates nationwide in 2019, and 11% of graduate students during that same period, reported having a disability. This includes students reporting having deafness or serious difficulty hearing, blindness or serious difficulty seeing, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical or mental or emotional condition, or serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs. The National Center for College Students with Disabilities claims that students with disabilities report being unaware of their campus disability resource office and its services, challenges navigating campus procedures, and inadequate accommodations as barriers to access and participation on campus. Therefore, it is likely that the potential to expand support and services provided for students with disabilities exists.

Accommodations. Federal law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability but colleges may require proof of a disability to justify the provision of academic accommodations. Colleges are not required to pay diagnostic assessment costs. Unlike in a K-12 education setting, it is incumbent upon the student, not the institution of higher education (IHE) they attend, to identify, determine the severity, and provide proof of their disability. Because students often must pay to cover the costs for their own assessments, if they do not have health insurance coverage sufficient to cover the costs they may need to pay out-of-pocket, with assessments and documentation typically costing from \$500 to \$2,500. This bill requires the CSU, and requests the UC, to cover the cost of student disability diagnostic assessments beginning July 1, 2027, and subject to an appropriation.

- 3) **Prior Legislation.** AB 624 (Grayson), of the 2024 Legislative Session, almost identical to this bill, would have also required the CSU, and requested the UC, to cover costs of student diagnostic assessments and would have required the Department of General Services to oversee reimbursement of costs incurred by institutions. The Governor vetoed the bill citing concerns about the significant cost of at least \$5 million ongoing General Fund not reflected in the state's budget.

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