

TICUA Policy Update

April 13, 2017

Reconnect Passes House

This week the House passed the Governor's Reconnect scholarship plan for adult students. The Senate, however, has not acted on the bill since it passed the Senate Finance Committee back in March. Now that the House has passed the measure it is anticipated that the Senate will take action. The bill was earlier amended to include four year colleges and universities which have associate degree programs which includes several TICUA member colleges and universities.

The Reconnect scholarship is restricted to students who are declared independent by way of the FAFSA, have not received a previous degree, and be enrolled in at least 6 credit hours. It is anticipated that 24,000 students will be taking advantage of the program which begins in the fall of 2018 at a cost of over \$10 million. Currently enrolled students will be eligible upon the inception of the program. As with Tennessee Promise, the Reconnect program is a last-dollar scholarship; the Pell Grant and other state aid must be counted prior to Reconnect dollars being received. The scholarship amount for the four year institutions is capped at the average community college tuition and required fees rate.

More information on Reconnect: <https://www.tn.gov/nexttennessee/topic/nt-one-pagertennessee-reconnect>

STRONG Act Awaits Governor's Signature

The STRONG Act unanimously passed both the Senate and House chambers this week and is now awaiting the Governor's signature. The STRONG Act allows members of any National Guard branch to receive free tuition at a public university or receive a scholarship equivalent to average of the public university tuition at a TICUA member institution. Students must first apply federal and state non-payback aid before the STRONG Act funds are applied.

This four-year pilot program requires the Reservist to be in good standing with the National Guard, not have previously received a BA or BS degree, and maintain a 2.0 GPA. The scholarship is a reimbursement program and pays for hours completed each semester. As well, the program is capped at 120 credit hours.

More information on the STRONG Act: <http://www.tn.gov/nexttennessee/topic/nt-one-pager-tennessee-strong-act>

Undocumented Student Aid Bill Fails

This past week the bill which will allow students without documented citizenship to receive in-state tuition at public colleges and universities failed in the House Education Administration and Planning

Committee. The measure failed to get enough votes to move on to the House Finance Committee even though it had Governor Haslam's support. Bill sponsors Sen. Todd Gardenhire and Rep. Mark White introduced similar legislation in the past but those previous attempts failed as well.

The bill, focused on undocumented residents, would have allowed eligible students to pay in-state tuition at certain public colleges and universities. To qualify the students must have lived in Tennessee for two years prior to either graduating from a Tennessee high school, obtaining a passing score on the GED or HiSET, or graduating from a homeschool program. As well, the bill empowered each institution's governing board or governing system to decide whether they would allow the discounted tuition.

Board of Trust Bill Sent to House and Senate Chambers for Vote

Sen. Dolores Gresham and Rep. David Hawk are sponsoring a measure which will allow Trustees serving on a TICUA member board to also serve on a board of a public Locally Governed Institution (LGI). Last year's passage of the FOCUS act prohibited Governor Haslam's appointees to the governing Boards of the former TBR universities to serve on any other higher education institutional board. As a result, two Board members of TICUA institutions were asked to resign in order to accept the Governor's appointment. If passed, this bill will modify the restriction to apply only to other public institution and system governing boards and not to private colleges or universities.

The bill has made it through the House committees and is scheduled to be voted on in the chamber on Monday, April 17th. The Senate version is likely to be voted on by the full membership this next week as well.