

ASSEMBLY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 3373

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: OCTOBER 23, 2008

The Assembly Higher Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 3373.

This bill makes a number of revisions to the NJ STARS and NJ STARS II Programs. In the case of the NJ STARS Program, the major changes include the following:

1) to be eligible for the NJ STARS Program a high school student must graduate in the top 15.0% of the class as opposed to the current 20% requirement, and the student must also have completed a rigorous high school course of study in accordance with standards established by the Commission on Higher Education in consultation with the Commissioner of Education;

2) a dependent child of a parent or guardian who has been transferred to a military installation located in the State will be considered a State resident for the purposes of qualifying for an NJ STARS scholarship. This same change is made under the NJ STARS II Program;

3) upon notice from the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority in the senior year of high school of a student's conditional eligibility for the NJ STARS Program, a student who wishes to pursue final eligibility for the program must take a college placement test to determine the student's readiness for college-level coursework. The test will be administered by the county college of the county in which the student's school district is located, at no cost to the student or school district. If the county college notifies a student that the test indicates the student needs remediation prior to undertaking course work for credit at the college level, then the student will have the responsibility to address the identified deficiencies during senior year through such means as the student determines, which may include enrolling in remedial classes at a county college;

4) if upon graduation from high school a student meets the eligibility criteria for the NJ STARS Program but is still not able to demonstrate the skills necessary to pursue courses for credit at a county college, the student will not receive an NJ STARS scholarship until that ability is demonstrated. The student will have one year from the September 1 following the date of graduation to demonstrate that ability, and if at the end of that one-year period is not able to do so, then the student will lose eligibility for the program. If however,

during or by the end of the one-year period the student demonstrates the required proficiency, the student will then be eligible for an NJ STARS scholarship for five semesters;

5) increases the number of credits per semester covered by an NJ STARS scholarship from 15 to 18;

6) allows a scholarship student to take less than 12 credits in the final semester of scholarship eligibility, if the county college determines that the student needs to complete less than 12 credits to complete the degree program; and

7) establishes a procedure for the county college acceptance of college credits earned by an NJ STARS student while still in high school and the application of those credits toward an associate degree under the program.

In the case of the NJ STARS II Program, the major changes include the following:

1) to be eligible for NJ STARS II, an NJ STARS student must graduate from the county college with a cumulative grade point average of 3.25. Under current law an NJ STARS student is only required to attain a 3.0 grade point average in order to be eligible for the NJ STARS II Program;

2) to establish initial eligibility for the NJ STARS II Program a student's family income must be less than \$250,000;

3) the NJ STARS II scholarship will only cover tuition, except that in the case of a student who is eligible for a Tuition Aid Grant the scholarship will cover tuition and fees. Under current law the total amount of tuition and fees is covered for all students under the program following the application of all other available forms of State and federal need-based grants and merit scholarships;

4) the amount of the scholarship awarded will be dependent upon the student's grade point average. For the third academic year of study at a four-year public institution of higher education, if the student attained a cumulative grade point average upon graduation from a county college that is equal to or greater than 3.25 and less than 3.50 the student will be eligible for a scholarship of up to \$3,000 per semester; and if the student attained a cumulative grade point average equal to or greater than 3.50, the student will be eligible for a scholarship of up to \$3,500 per semester. For the fourth academic year of study, the amount of the scholarship will be dependent upon the student's grade point average during the third academic year of study;

5) the cost of an NJ STARS II scholarship will be paid 50% by the State and 50% by the public institution of higher education. Any cost of attendance that is not covered by the scholarship or other available forms of grants and scholarships will be paid by the student; and

6) eligibility for the NJ STARS II Program is extended to a student who was eligible for NJ STARS but did not receive a scholarship under that program because the student earned an associate

degree while enrolled in high school under a joint program offered by the student's school district and a county college.

The bill provides that in the case of a student who is receiving an NJ STARS scholarship on the bill's effective date, that student will remain eligible for an NJ STARS scholarship in accordance with the program's current criteria. However, such a student who is in the first year of county college enrollment will need at least a 3.25 cumulative grade point average upon graduation from a county college in order to qualify for the NJ STARS II Program. A student who is in the second year of county college enrollment will only need to meet the current GPA requirement of 3.0 in order to qualify for NJ STARS II.

In the case of a student who is receiving an NJ STARS II scholarship on the bill's effective date, that student will remain eligible for an NJ STARS II scholarship in accordance with the program's current criteria.