

AN ACT concerning education.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 5. The Higher Education Student Assistance Act is amended by changing Sections 25 and 31 as follows:

(110 ILCS 947/25)

Sec. 25. State scholar program.

(a) An applicant is eligible to be designated a State Scholar when the Commission finds the candidate:

(1) is a resident of this State and a citizen or permanent resident of the United States;

(2) has successfully completed the program of instruction at an approved high school, or is a student in good standing at such a school and is engaged in a program which in due course will be completed by the end of the academic year, and in either event that the candidate's academic standing is above the class median; and that the candidate has not had any university, college, normal school, private junior college or public community college, or other advanced training subsequent to graduation from high school; and

(3) has superior capacity to profit by a higher education.

(b) In determining an applicant's superior capacity to profit by a higher education, the Commission shall consider the candidate's scholastic record in high school and the results of the examination conducted under the provisions of this Act. The Commission shall establish by rule the minimum conditions of eligibility in terms of the foregoing factors, and the relative weight to be accorded to those factors.

(c) The Commission shall base its State Scholar designations upon the eligibility formula prescribed in its rules, except that notwithstanding those rules or any other provision of this Section, a student nominated by his or her school shall be designated a State Scholar if that student achieves an Illinois Standard Test Score at or above the 95th percentile among students taking the designated examinations in Illinois that year, as determined by the Commission.

(d) The Commission shall obtain the results of a competitive examination from the applicants this Act. The examination shall provide a measure of each candidate's ability to perform college work and shall have demonstrated utility in such a selection program. The Commission shall select, and designate by rule, the specific examinations to be used in determining the applicant's superior capacity to profit from a higher education. Candidates may be asked by the Commission to take those steps necessary to provide results of the designated examination as part of their applications. Any nominal cost of obtaining or providing the examination results shall be paid by

the candidate to the agency designated by the Commission to provide the examination service. In the event that a candidate or candidates are unable to participate in the examination for financial reasons, the Commission may choose to pay the examination fee on the candidate's or candidates' behalf. Any notary fee which may also be required as part of the total application shall be paid by the applicant.

(e) The Commission shall award to each State Scholar a certificate or other suitable form of recognition. The decision to attend a non-qualified institution of higher learning shall not disqualify applicants who are otherwise fully qualified.

(f) Subject to appropriation, each State Scholar who enrolls or is enrolled in an institution of higher learning in this State shall also receive a one-time grant of \$1,000 to be applied to tuition and mandatory fees and paid directly to the institution of higher learning. However, a student who has been awarded a Merit Recognition Scholarship under Section 31 of this Act may not be awarded a grant under this subsection (f), although he or she may still be designated a State Scholar.

(g) The Commission shall adopt all necessary and proper rules not inconsistent with this Section for its effective implementation.

(Source: P.A. 87-997.)

(110 ILCS 947/31)

Sec. 31. Merit Recognition Scholarship program.

(a) As used in this Section:

"Eligible applicant" means a student from any high school in this State, either approved by or not recognized by the State Board of Education, who is engaged in a program of study that in due course will be completed by the end of the academic year, and (i) whose cumulative high school grade point average is at or above the 95th percentile of his or her high school class after completion of the 6th semester of a high school program of instruction or (ii) whose score on a standardized examination determined by the Commission, taken before or during the 6th semester of high school, is at or above the 95th percentile of students in the State who take the standardized college entrance examination. These high school students are all eligible to receive a scholarship to be awarded under this Section.

"Qualified student" means a person:

(1) who is a resident of this State and a citizen or permanent resident of the United States;

(2) who, as an eligible applicant, is in good academic standing at the high school in which he or she is enrolled and has made a timely application for a Merit Recognition Scholarship under this Section;

(3) who has successfully completed the program of instruction at any high school located in this State; and

(4) who enrolls or is enrolled in a qualified Illinois institution of higher learning or a Service Academy as an

undergraduate student or cadet and has not received a baccalaureate degree.

"Merit Recognition Scholarship" means a \$1,000 academic scholarship awarded under this Section during an academic year to a qualified student, without regard to financial need, as a scholarship to any qualified Illinois institution of higher learning or a Service Academy in which the student is or will be enrolled as an undergraduate student or cadet.

"Service Academy" means the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, the U.S. Military Academy, or the U.S. Naval Academy.

(b) In order to identify, encourage, promote, and reward the distinguished academic achievement of students from every high school located in this State, each qualified student shall be awarded a Merit Recognition Scholarship by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission to any qualified Illinois institution of higher learning or to any Service Academy.

(b-5) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Section, a student who has received a grant under the State Scholar program under Section 25 of this Act is ineligible to receive a Merit Recognition Scholarship.

(c) No Merit Recognition Scholarship provided for a qualified student under this Section shall be considered in evaluating the financial situation of that student or be deemed a financial resource of or a form of financial aid or assistance to that student, for purposes of determining the

eligibility of the student for any scholarship, grant, or monetary assistance awarded by the Commission, the State, or any agency thereof pursuant to the provisions of any other Section of this Act or any other law of this State; nor shall any Merit Recognition Scholarship provided for a qualified student under this Section reduce the amount of any scholarship, grant, or monetary assistance that that student is eligible to be awarded by the Commission, the State, or any agency thereof in accordance with the provisions of any other Section of this Act or any other law of this State.

(d) The Illinois Student Assistance Commission is designated as administrator of the Merit Recognition Scholarship program. Each high school located in this State shall certify to the Commission the names of its students who are eligible applicants, specifying which of the students certified as eligible applicants have completed the program of instruction at that high school and the graduation date fixed for their high school class and specifying for each of the other eligible applicants whose names appear on the certification the semester of high school last completed by them. The Commission shall promptly notify those eligible applicants so certified who are reasonably assured of receiving a Merit Recognition Scholarship in accordance with the annual funding levels recommended in the Governor's budget of their eligibility to apply for a scholarship under this Section, other than any eligible applicant named on any such

certification who, as an eligible applicant, has previously made application to the Commission for a Merit Recognition Scholarship under this Section. An otherwise eligible applicant who fails to make a timely application (as determined by the Commission) for a Merit Recognition Scholarship under this Section shall no longer be deemed an eligible applicant and shall not qualify for the award.

(e) All applications for Merit Recognition Scholarships to be awarded under this Section shall be made to the Commission on forms that the Commission shall provide for eligible applicants. The form of applications and the information required to be set forth therein shall be determined by the Commission, and the Commission shall require eligible applicants to submit with their applications such supporting documents as the Commission deems necessary.

(f) The names and addresses of Merit Recognition Scholarship recipients are a matter of public record.

(g) Whenever an eligible applicant who has completed the program of instruction at any high school located in this State thereafter makes timely application to the Commission for a Merit Recognition Scholarship under this Section, the Commission shall promptly determine whether that eligible applicant is a qualified student as defined in subsection (a) of this Section. Each such eligible applicant so determined by the Commission to be a qualified student shall be awarded a Merit Recognition Scholarship in the amount of \$1,000,

effective exclusively during the academic year following the qualified student's high school graduation, subject to appropriation by the General Assembly.

(h) Subject to a separate appropriation for purposes of this Section, payment of any Merit Recognition Scholarship awarded under this Section shall be determined exclusively by the Commission. All scholarship funds distributed in accordance with this subsection (h) shall be paid to the qualified Illinois institution of higher learning or Service Academy and used only for payment of the educational expenses incurred by the student in connection with his or her attendance as an undergraduate student or cadet at that institution or Service Academy, including but not limited to tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, required Service Academy uniforms, and travel and personal expenses related to the student's attendance at that institution or Service Academy. Any Merit Recognition Scholarship awarded under this Section shall be applicable to 2 semesters or 3 quarters of enrollment. Should a qualified student withdraw from enrollment prior to completion of the first semester or quarter for which the Merit Recognition Scholarship is applicable, the student shall refund to the Commission the amount of the scholarship received.

(i) The Commission shall administer the Merit Recognition Scholarship program established by this Section and shall make all necessary and proper rules, not inconsistent with this

Section, for its effective implementation.

(j) When an appropriation to the Commission for purposes of this Section is insufficient to provide scholarships to all qualified students, the Commission shall allocate the appropriation in accordance with this subsection (j). If funds are insufficient to provide all qualified students with a scholarship as authorized by subsection (g) of this Section, the Commission shall allocate the scholarships to qualified students in order of decreasing relative academic rank, as determined by the Commission using a formula based upon the qualified student's grade point average, score on the appropriate statewide standardized examination, or a combination of grade point average and standardized test score. All Merit Recognition Scholarships awarded shall be in the amount of \$1,000.

(k) The Commission, in determining the number of Merit Recognition Scholarships to be offered pursuant to subsection (j) of this Section, shall take into consideration past experience with the rate of merit scholarship funds unclaimed by qualified students. To the extent necessary to avoid an over-commitment of funds, the Commission may allocate scholarship funds on the basis of the date the Commission receives a completed application form.

(Source: P.A. 91-128, eff. 7-1-00.)