

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 adding Section 62 as follows:

(110 ILCS 947/62 new)

Sec. 62. Grants for exonerated persons.

(a) In this Section:

"Exonerated person" means an individual who has received a pardon from the Governor of the State of Illinois stating that such a pardon is issued on the grounds of innocence of the crime for which he or she was imprisoned or an individual who has received a certificate of innocence from a circuit court pursuant to Section 2-702 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

"Satisfactory academic progress" means the qualified applicant's maintenance of minimum standards of academic performance, consistent with requirements for maintaining federal financial aid eligibility, as determined by the institution of higher learning.

(b) Subject to a separate appropriation for this purpose, the Commission shall, each year, receive and consider applications for grant assistance under this Section. Recipients of grants issued by the Commission in accordance

with this Section must be exonerated persons. Provided that the recipient is maintaining satisfactory academic progress, the funds from the grant may be used to pay up to 8 semesters or 12 quarters of full payment of tuition and mandatory fees at any public university or public community college located in this State for either full or part-time study. This benefit may be used for undergraduate or graduate study.

In addition, an exonerated person who has not yet received a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate and completes a high school equivalency preparation course through an Illinois Community College Board-approved provider may use grant funds to pay costs associated with obtaining a high school equivalency certificate, including payment of the cost of the high school equivalency test and up to one retest on each test module, and any additional fees that may be required in order to obtain an Illinois High School Equivalency Certificate or an official transcript of test scores after successful completion of the high school equivalency test.

(c) An applicant for a grant under this Section need not demonstrate financial need to qualify for the benefits.

(d) The Commission may adopt any rules necessary to implement and administer this Section.