

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Lessen Higher Education Financial Aid Issues for Students Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

05/15/2020

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation (S2356/A3946) to provide relief for students enrolled in various state higher education financial aid programs and address the unique circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“My Administration has made higher education a priority, and we must ensure that no student’s education is negatively impacted by circumstances outside of their control,” **said Governor Murphy**. “This legislation will protect our students from unforeseen financial hardship brought about by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.”

S2356/A3946 directs the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) to exclude the Spring 2020 semester from a student’s total lifetime eligibility limits for all state financial aid programs if a student is unable to finish the semester due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, students who withdrew or reduced credits during this time will not have to repay the state financial aid amounts that the student would have had to return under previous law.

The eligibility criteria for the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship (NJ STARS) Program and the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship II (NJ STARS II) Program will also be temporarily relaxed to allow students to remain eligible even if their Spring 2020 grade point average fell below the previous eligibility minimums.

“On behalf of students across New Jersey whose spring semester was disrupted by the COVID-19 crisis, we thank the Governor and the legislative sponsors for taking this important action to adjust state financial aid policies in recognition of the unusual circumstances students faced during this year’s abrupt shift to remote learning,” **said David J. Socolow, executive director of HESAA**. “HESAA has taken several other steps to support students during this pandemic emergency, and the law enacted today provides new tools we can use to assist students.”

The legislation was sponsored by Assemblymembers Mila Jasey, Ralph Caputo, and Aura Dunn and Senators Sandra Cunningham and Tom Kean.

“While the semester is over for most, college students around the state still face immense uncertainty as to what the future will hold. They should not have to worry about whether or not their inability to complete their classes this semester will impact their financial aid eligibility for the years ahead,” **said Senator Cunningham**. “I am grateful the Governor saw the value in this legislation and has moved quickly to enact it into law. Hopefully, it can bring college students some peace of mind during these trying times.”



"COVID-19 has disrupted the lives and education of every New Jersey college student," **said Senate Republican Leader Tom Kean**. "This pandemic, while a setback, should not be an obstacle for students in need of crucial financial support. This law will ensure our college scholars have the necessary tools and resources to continue and successfully complete their studies."

"I applaud Governor Murphy for making the right decision by signing this necessary bill," **said Assemblywoman Dunn**. "With the coronavirus pandemic affecting all aspects of higher education, we must make sure NJ STARS scholars and all college students' ability to achieve a degree isn't hindered. Students shouldn't have to worry about losing their financial aid because the coronavirus has impacted their ability to fulfill all the requirements associated with using financial aid."

Joint statement from Assemblymembers Jasey and Caputo:

"The college experience has been significantly disrupted for students across New Jersey. No longer are most students living in dorms, attending interactive classes or participating in clubs and activities on campus. Few could have predicted they would end the semester learning remotely at home, largely isolated from their professors and peers.

"It may be more difficult for students to learn at home, particularly if they don't have access to a computer or the Internet. Some may have needed time away from schoolwork to care for family members diagnosed with COVID-19, or to recover from illness themselves.

"Students shouldn't need to worry if they will lose access to financial aid if they need to temporarily scale back classes as a result of the pandemic. During these unprecedented times, it's important that we treat one another with compassion and understanding."

Governor Phil Murphy

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