



The Bell Policy Center

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Improvements in College Completion

House Bill 12-1155

Testimony to the House Education Committee

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My name is Frank Waterous, and I am a senior policy analyst with the Bell Policy Center. The Bell is a non-partisan, non-profit research and policy organization, founded on progressive values and dedicated to expanding opportunity for all Coloradans.

The Bell Policy Center is currently in an “amend” position on House Bill 12-1155, “Improvements in College Completion.” We strongly support several key provisions in the bill that we believe will contribute to increased post-secondary student success. However, we are concerned that other provisions could work against this important goal. This is particularly true regarding the bill’s proposed limitations on College Opportunity Fund stipend and need-based financial aid eligibility.

Let me start by outlining what we like very much about HB 1155. First, the bill’s focus on clarifying and aligning the state’s remedial education and admissions policies is an important step forward. Within this area, we especially support the idea of differentiating basic-skills mathematics requirements based on the student’s intended program of study. For too many students, being required to demonstrate a mathematics proficiency that is neither associated with nor necessary for their career path is a significant barrier to post-secondary success.

Second, the bill’s requirement that data on students’ post-secondary enrollment, placement, persistence and completion be provided to the school districts from which they graduated is very positive, and one that we wholeheartedly support. This sharing of data will assist Colorado in achieving our ongoing P-20 education alignment goals, and will bolster school districts’ ability to implement data-driven continuous-improvement efforts that will ensure that more students are prepared for post-secondary success.

Third, we believe that the concept of “supplemental academic instruction” contained in the bill is consistent with best practices identified in the research regarding the value of allowing students to address limited academic deficiencies while continuing to make progress in college-level coursework. Helping qualified students get

the additional academic support they need without being required to take a full basic-skills course draws on the important instructional concepts of modularization and contextualization, and will contribute to improved college completion.

So what's not to like about HB 1155? Several items are problematic for us, on which we would welcome amendments. First, although basic skills credits and supplemental academic instruction credits would serve the same important purpose, and both would be COF-stipend-eligible, only basic skills credits would not count against a student's lifetime COF limit based on current statute. We believe that this inconsistency should be corrected in the bill, and that **supplemental academic instruction credits also should not count against the student's lifetime COF limit.** This is especially true because the lack of such an exemption could unintentionally dissuade students from wanting to take these credits, thereby keeping them from receiving the additional instruction they need for academic success.

Second, while we support the bill's call for an analysis of the effects of any potential modifications to COF stipend amounts and credit-hour limitations, **we do not support the bill's requirement for lowering the COF lifetime limit from 145 to 140 credit hours before the outcomes of that analysis are known.** It would seem far more prudent to conduct the analysis of lowering the COF limit first, thereby identifying both the positive and negative effects of any change prior to implementing any new policy.

Third, and most urgently, we are particularly concerned with the bill's provision limiting students' lifetime eligibility for state-funded, need-based financial aid to 140 credit hours. We know of no evidence from the research suggesting that restricting eligibility for financial aid is an effective inducement for improved or accelerated college completion. In fact, we are concerned that such a policy might have just the opposite effect, actually discouraging students from entering post-secondary programs or persisting toward completion. The mixed message that it conveys is very problematic at a time when we are trying to encourage more students, including working adults and those who may have left college prior to earning a credential, to upgrade their educational attainment and workforce skills. **We urge you to remove this provision, or to at least require that it be thoroughly analyzed before any change is made so that its positive and negative consequences can be better understood.**

In closing, the Bell Policy Center believes that certain provisions of House Bill 12-1155 have the potential to increase post-secondary student success in our state, while others could work counter to this goal. As a result, without amendments – particularly the removal of the provisions limiting students' eligibility for COF stipends and state-funded need-based financial aid – we are unable at this time to support the bill. We stand ready, though, to work with all those involved on changes that would address our concerns and strengthen the legislation.

Finally, we want to thank Representative Massey for bringing the bill to you, and for what we know is his sincere and continuing commitment to helping more Colorado students succeed. We also thank the committee for the opportunity to share our testimony with you today. If you have any questions, or if I can provide further information, please call me at 303-297-0456 or email me at waterous@bellpolicy.org.