

**SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Austin Gilbert, Chairman, and Members,
Commission on Higher Education

FROM: Mr. Frank Gilbert, Chairman,
Committee on Access & Equity and Student Services

**Consideration of Regulations for the Legislative Incentives
For Future Excellence (LIFE) Scholarship Program**

The 1998 General Assembly approved House Bill 4535, Legislative Incentives for Future Excellence (LIFE) Scholarships. The bill authorizes funding for scholarships in the amount of \$2,000 to eligible students attending four-year public and independent colleges and universities, and scholarships in the amount of \$1,000 to eligible students attending two-year public and independent colleges and universities in South Carolina. The goals of the LIFE Scholarship Program are to increase access to higher education, improve the employability of South Carolina's students so as to attract business to the State, and provide incentives for students to be better prepared for college, to improve SAT scores, and to graduate from college on time.

As required under the South Carolina Administrative Procedures Act, attached are the regulations for the LIFE Scholarship Program. The public hearing to review the LIFE regulations was held during the Commission's meeting on December 3, 1998. However, there are three sections of the enclosed regulations which offer additional language or alternative language proposed by some of the institutional representatives. The Access & Equity and Student Services Committee met on January 5, 1999 to review and take action on the proposed language (Student Eligibility (62-540) Section H., Continued Eligibility (62-550) Section A., and Transferring Students (62-600) Section D.). The Committees' decision and institutional discussion is included.

62-540 Student Eligibility

Addition:

I. By the year 2000, a student must meet the requirements of Section A above and have passed all courses required for the STAR Diploma. For those students who graduate from approved home-school programs or out-of-state high schools, students must meet equivalent STAR Diploma requirements. Using the final high school transcripts, institutions must verify that the students met the cumulative grade point average requirement and have passed all courses required for the STAR Diploma at the end of the eighth semester.

The addition of Section I. in the proposed LIFE regulations, will allow all students who receive a STAR Diploma or pass all course requirements for the STAR Diploma beginning academic year 2000 to be eligible for the LIFE Scholarship, thereby omitting the need for many of the high schools or institutions to calculate the highest of weighted or unweighted scales for the majority of the state's high school seniors. However, the high schools and institutions will continue to calculate the GPA and course requirements (or equivalents) for the STAR Diploma for those students who graduate from approved home-school programs, out-of-state high schools, and SC high schools that do not issue a STAR Diploma.

The institutional representatives present at the meeting expressed several concerns related to 62-540 I. In order for institutions to determine if every LIFE eligible student meets each STAR Diploma requirement, they will have to institute a transcript evaluation process that they are not prepared to manage. In addition, The deadline for students to meet all STAR diploma eligibility requirements is December of the senior year. However, the deadline for students to meet the requirements for the LIFE Scholarship is June of the senior year. Many institutions will make preliminary financial aid awards including the LIFE Scholarship by April, before the senior year is complete. It is likely that some students will come into or out of compliance between December and June. Therefore, the perception may exist that a student is a LIFE recipient when they have actually fallen out of compliance. As a result, there is a possibility for confusion between the financial aid office and the student.

62-550 Continued Eligibility

A: To retain the LIFE Scholarship the student must earn an average of 30 credit hours for each academic year and earn a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale by the end of the academic year consistent with the policies and procedures of the institution for graduation purposes. Advanced placement and CLEP credit may be counted towards the 30 credit hour requirement.

62-600 Transferring Students

D. For determining initial eligibility for the first time at the institution, transfer students must have:

1. earned a cumulative 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale at the transferring institution. For future eligibility in subsequent years, the student must earn a cumulative 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale consistent with the policies and procedures of the institution for graduation purposes.

The institutions discussed, at length the issues concerning 62-550 A. and 62-600 D. Both regulations have a significant impact on transfer students. A majority of institutions strongly supported the language that was approved by the Access & Equity and Student Services Committee, however, a minority expressed concern for the student perspective. They felt as though the language approved would hinder transfer students from receiving the LIFE Scholarship. It was stated that policies and procedures at institutions vary and transfer students may not be awarded LIFE simply because the institution may not accept the credit hours or GPA earned at prior institutions. In addition, some of the institutions were in favor of accepting language that would required the institutions to maintain a separate LIFE GPA and total Credit Hours Earned for purposes of LIFE Scholarship awards. The majority of Institutions were in opposition of this because it would be administratively challenging.

In addition, the proposed sections in the regulations regarding continued eligibility and transfer as recommended by the participating institutions may not meet the intent of The law as created by the General Assembly states:

Section 59-149-50.

(B) Students receiving a LIFE Scholarship to retain it and students currently enrolled in an eligible institution to receive such a scholarship must earn a 3.0 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale each year and earn at least thirty credit hours for the maximum of semesters permitted at the institution by Section 59-149-60.

Section 59-149-80. Students transferring from one eligible public or independent institution of this State to another **are eligible for a LIFE scholarship**, if they continue to meet all eligibility requirements

I. 62-540 Student Eligibility

*1. By the year 2000, a student must meet the requirements of Section A above and have passed all courses required for the STAR Diploma. For those students who graduate from approved home-school programs or out-of-state high schools, students must meet equivalent STAR Diploma requirements. Using the final high school transcripts, institutions must verify that the students met the cumulative grade point average requirement and have passed all courses required for the STAR Diploma at the end of the eighth semester.***62-540 Student Eligibility**

II. 62-550 Continued Eligibility

A: To retain the LIFE Scholarship the student must earn an average of 30 credit hours for each academic year and earn a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale by the end of the academic year consistent with the policies and procedures of the institution for

graduation purposes. Advanced placement and CLEP credit may be counted towards the 30 credit hour requirement.

III. 62-600 Transferring Students

D. For determining initial eligibility for the first time at the institution, transfer students must have:

- 1. earned a cumulative 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale at the transferring institution. For future eligibility in subsequent years, the student must earn a cumulative 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale consistent with the policies and procedures of the institution for graduation purposes.*

Recommendation

The Committee on Access and Equity and Student Services recommends that the Commission on Higher Education approve the proposed regulations including the above language modifications for the Legislative Incentives for Future Excellence (LIFE) Scholarship Program for submission to the General Assembly during the 1999 legislative session.