

STATE OF NEW YORK

6938

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

April 14, 2021

Introduced by M. of A. EPSTEIN -- read once and referred to the Committee on Higher Education

AN ACT to amend the general business law, in relation to prohibiting certain practices in the collection of education debt; and to amend the education law, in relation to student debts and extending college access challenge grant funds to ready adults returning to school to complete a degree

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Section 601 of the general business law is amended by adding a new subdivision 12 to read as follows:

12. Notwithstanding section three hundred fifty-five of the education law or 8 NYCRR Part 302, withhold a student's transcript for failure to pay past or presently due tuition, condition the provision of a transcript on the payment of a debt, other than a fee charged to provide the transcript, or otherwise use transcript issuance as a tool for debt collection.

§ 2. Section 602 of the general business law is amended by adding a new subdivision 4 to read as follows:

4. Any violation of this article is also a deceptive act and practices under section three hundred forty-nine of this chapter.

§ 3. Section 2 of the education law is amended by adding a new subdivision 25 to read as follows:

25. Debt. The term "debt" means any money, obligation, claim, or sum, due or owing, or alleged to be due or owing, from a student, but does not include the fee, if any, charged to all students for the actual costs of providing the transcripts.

§ 4. The education law is amended by adding a new article 13-c to read as follows:

ARTICLE 13-C

STUDENT DEBT; PROHIBITED PRACTICES

Section 640. Student debt; prohibited practices.

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

LBD08218-02-1

1 § 640. Student debt; prohibited practices. 1. Notwithstanding any
2 provisions of law, no institution of higher education, including
3 colleges, universities, and organizations offering career education, as
4 defined in section 2 of this chapter shall:

5 (a) withhold a student's transcript for failure to pay past or pres-
6 ently due tuition;

7 (b) condition the provision of a transcript on the payment of a debt,
8 other than a fee charged to provide the transcript;

9 (c) charge a higher fee for obtaining a transcript, or provide less
10 favorable treatment of a transcript request because a student owes a
11 debt; or

12 (d) use transcript issuance as a tool for debt collection.

13 2. Institutions of higher education, including colleges, universities,
14 and organizations offering career education may not withhold a student's
15 official transcript, regardless of debt, except the fee charged to
16 provide an official transcript, if the official transcript is requested
17 by a student or entity for any of the following purposes:

18 (a) job application;

19 (b) transferring to another institution;

20 (c) applying for financial aid;

21 (d) pursuit of opportunities in the military or national guard; or

22 (e) pursuit of other post-secondary opportunities.

23 3. In addition to such penalties as may otherwise be applicable by
24 law, the commissioner or the superintendent of financial services may,
25 after notice and hearing, enjoin such transcript withholding practices
26 and require any college found to be violating the provisions of this
27 article or the rules or regulations promulgated hereunder to pay to the
28 people of this state a penalty of five hundred dollars for each
29 violation.

30 4. In addition to the right of action granted to the department or the
31 superintendent of financial services pursuant to this section, any
32 person who has been injured by reason of any violation of this section
33 may bring an action in their own name to enjoin such unlawful act or
34 practice. The court may, in its discretion, award reasonable attorney's
35 fees to the prevailing plaintiff.

36 5. Nothing in this article shall limit any statutory or common law
37 right of any person to bring any action in any court for any act, or the
38 right of the state to punish any person for any violation of law.

39 § 5. The education law is amended by adding a new section 669-i to
40 read as follows:

41 § 669-i. Ready adult grant program. 1. For the purposes of this
42 section, "eligible ready adult applicant" means a person who was previ-
43 ously enrolled at a state-operated institution or community college and
44 who has completed at least seventy-five percent of a degree or certif-
45 icate program.

46 2. Within amounts received by the state from the college access chal-
47 lenge grant, the corporation shall grant awards to eligible ready adult
48 applicants equal to up to one hundred percent of the tuition charged to
49 state resident students attending an undergraduate program full-time at
50 the state university of New York or a community college, or actual
51 tuition charged, whichever is less, for credits needed to complete an
52 undergraduate degree or certificate program.

53 § 6. This act shall take effect on the thirtieth day after it shall
54 have become a law.