

1 AN ACT concerning education.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 5. The Higher Education Student Assistance Act is
5 amended by changing Sections 25 and 31 as follows:

6 (110 ILCS 947/25)

7 Sec. 25. State scholar program.

8 (a) An applicant is eligible to be designated a State
9 Scholar when the Commission finds the candidate:

10 (1) is a resident of this State and a citizen or
11 permanent resident of the United States;

12 (2) has successfully completed the program of
13 instruction at an approved high school, or is a student in
14 good standing at such a school and is engaged in a program
15 which in due course will be completed by the end of the
16 academic year, and in either event that the candidate's
17 academic standing is above the class median; and that the
18 candidate has not had any university, college, normal
19 school, private junior college or public community
20 college, or other advanced training subsequent to
21 graduation from high school; and

22 (3) has superior capacity to profit by a higher
23 education.

1 (b) In determining an applicant's superior capacity to
2 profit by a higher education, the Commission shall consider the
3 candidate's scholastic record in high school and the results of
4 the examination conducted under the provisions of this Act. The
5 Commission shall establish by rule the minimum conditions of
6 eligibility in terms of the foregoing factors, and the relative
7 weight to be accorded to those factors.

8 (c) The Commission shall base its State Scholar
9 designations upon the eligibility formula prescribed in its
10 rules, except that notwithstanding those rules or any other
11 provision of this Section, a student nominated by his or her
12 school shall be designated a State Scholar if that student
13 achieves an Illinois Standard Test Score at or above the 95th
14 percentile among students taking the designated examinations
15 in Illinois that year, as determined by the Commission.

16 (d) The Commission shall obtain the results of a
17 competitive examination from the applicants this Act. The
18 examination shall provide a measure of each candidate's ability
19 to perform college work and shall have demonstrated utility in
20 such a selection program. The Commission shall select, and
21 designate by rule, the specific examinations to be used in
22 determining the applicant's superior capacity to profit from a
23 higher education. Candidates may be asked by the Commission to
24 take those steps necessary to provide results of the designated
25 examination as part of their applications. Any nominal cost of
26 obtaining or providing the examination results shall be paid by

1 the candidate to the agency designated by the Commission to
2 provide the examination service. In the event that a candidate
3 or candidates are unable to participate in the examination for
4 financial reasons, the Commission may choose to pay the
5 examination fee on the candidate's or candidates' behalf. Any
6 notary fee which may also be required as part of the total
7 application shall be paid by the applicant.

8 (e) The Commission shall award to each State Scholar a
9 certificate or other suitable form of recognition. The decision
10 to attend a non-qualified institution of higher learning shall
11 not disqualify applicants who are otherwise fully qualified.

12 (f) Subject to appropriation, each State Scholar who
13 enrolls or is enrolled in an institution of higher learning in
14 this State shall also receive a one-time grant of \$1,000 to be
15 applied to tuition and mandatory fees and paid directly to the
16 institution of higher learning. However, a student who has been
17 awarded a Merit Recognition Scholarship under Section 31 of
18 this Act may not be awarded a grant under this subsection (f),
19 although he or she may still be designated a State Scholar.

20 (g) The Commission shall adopt all necessary and proper
21 rules not inconsistent with this Section for its effective
22 implementation.

23 (Source: P.A. 87-997.)

24 (110 ILCS 947/31)

25 Sec. 31. Merit Recognition Scholarship program.

1 (a) As used in this Section:

2 "Eligible applicant" means a student from any high school
3 in this State, either approved by or not recognized by the
4 State Board of Education, who is engaged in a program of study
5 that in due course will be completed by the end of the academic
6 year, and (i) whose cumulative high school grade point average
7 is at or above the 95th percentile of his or her high school
8 class after completion of the 6th semester of a high school
9 program of instruction or (ii) whose score on a standardized
10 examination determined by the Commission, taken before or
11 during the 6th semester of high school, is at or above the 95th
12 percentile of students in the State who take the standardized
13 college entrance examination. These high school students are
14 all eligible to receive a scholarship to be awarded under this
15 Section.

16 "Qualified student" means a person:

17 (1) who is a resident of this State and a citizen or
18 permanent resident of the United States;

19 (2) who, as an eligible applicant, is in good academic
20 standing at the high school in which he or she is enrolled
21 and has made a timely application for a Merit Recognition
22 Scholarship under this Section;

23 (3) who has successfully completed the program of
24 instruction at any high school located in this State; and

25 (4) who enrolls or is enrolled in a qualified Illinois
26 institution of higher learning or a Service Academy as an

1 undergraduate student or cadet and has not received a
2 baccalaureate degree.

3 "Merit Recognition Scholarship" means a \$1,000 academic
4 scholarship awarded under this Section during an academic year
5 to a qualified student, without regard to financial need, as a
6 scholarship to any qualified Illinois institution of higher
7 learning or a Service Academy in which the student is or will
8 be enrolled as an undergraduate student or cadet.

9 "Service Academy" means the U.S. Air Force Academy, the
10 U.S. Coast Guard Academy, the U.S. Military Academy, or the
11 U.S. Naval Academy.

12 (b) In order to identify, encourage, promote, and reward
13 the distinguished academic achievement of students from every
14 high school located in this State, each qualified student shall
15 be awarded a Merit Recognition Scholarship by the Illinois
16 Student Assistance Commission to any qualified Illinois
17 institution of higher learning or to any Service Academy.

18 (b-5) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Section,
19 a student who has received a grant under the State Scholar
20 program under Section 25 of this Act is ineligible to receive a
21 Merit Recognition Scholarship.

22 (c) No Merit Recognition Scholarship provided for a
23 qualified student under this Section shall be considered in
24 evaluating the financial situation of that student or be deemed
25 a financial resource of or a form of financial aid or
26 assistance to that student, for purposes of determining the

1 eligibility of the student for any scholarship, grant, or
2 monetary assistance awarded by the Commission, the State, or
3 any agency thereof pursuant to the provisions of any other
4 Section of this Act or any other law of this State; nor shall
5 any Merit Recognition Scholarship provided for a qualified
6 student under this Section reduce the amount of any
7 scholarship, grant, or monetary assistance that that student is
8 eligible to be awarded by the Commission, the State, or any
9 agency thereof in accordance with the provisions of any other
10 Section of this Act or any other law of this State.

11 (d) The Illinois Student Assistance Commission is
12 designated as administrator of the Merit Recognition
13 Scholarship program. Each high school located in this State
14 shall certify to the Commission the names of its students who
15 are eligible applicants, specifying which of the students
16 certified as eligible applicants have completed the program of
17 instruction at that high school and the graduation date fixed
18 for their high school class and specifying for each of the
19 other eligible applicants whose names appear on the
20 certification the semester of high school last completed by
21 them. The Commission shall promptly notify those eligible
22 applicants so certified who are reasonably assured of receiving
23 a Merit Recognition Scholarship in accordance with the annual
24 funding levels recommended in the Governor's budget of their
25 eligibility to apply for a scholarship under this Section,
26 other than any eligible applicant named on any such

1 certification who, as an eligible applicant, has previously
2 made application to the Commission for a Merit Recognition
3 Scholarship under this Section. An otherwise eligible
4 applicant who fails to make a timely application (as determined
5 by the Commission) for a Merit Recognition Scholarship under
6 this Section shall no longer be deemed an eligible applicant
7 and shall not qualify for the award.

8 (e) All applications for Merit Recognition Scholarships to
9 be awarded under this Section shall be made to the Commission
10 on forms that the Commission shall provide for eligible
11 applicants. The form of applications and the information
12 required to be set forth therein shall be determined by the
13 Commission, and the Commission shall require eligible
14 applicants to submit with their applications such supporting
15 documents as the Commission deems necessary.

16 (f) The names and addresses of Merit Recognition
17 Scholarship recipients are a matter of public record.

18 (g) Whenever an eligible applicant who has completed the
19 program of instruction at any high school located in this State
20 thereafter makes timely application to the Commission for a
21 Merit Recognition Scholarship under this Section, the
22 Commission shall promptly determine whether that eligible
23 applicant is a qualified student as defined in subsection (a)
24 of this Section. Each such eligible applicant so determined by
25 the Commission to be a qualified student shall be awarded a
26 Merit Recognition Scholarship in the amount of \$1,000,

1 effective exclusively during the academic year following the
2 qualified student's high school graduation, subject to
3 appropriation by the General Assembly.

4 (h) Subject to a separate appropriation for purposes of
5 this Section, payment of any Merit Recognition Scholarship
6 awarded under this Section shall be determined exclusively by
7 the Commission. All scholarship funds distributed in
8 accordance with this subsection (h) shall be paid to the
9 qualified Illinois institution of higher learning or Service
10 Academy and used only for payment of the educational expenses
11 incurred by the student in connection with his or her
12 attendance as an undergraduate student or cadet at that
13 institution or Service Academy, including but not limited to
14 tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, required
15 Service Academy uniforms, and travel and personal expenses
16 related to the student's attendance at that institution or
17 Service Academy. Any Merit Recognition Scholarship awarded
18 under this Section shall be applicable to 2 semesters or 3
19 quarters of enrollment. Should a qualified student withdraw
20 from enrollment prior to completion of the first semester or
21 quarter for which the Merit Recognition Scholarship is
22 applicable, the student shall refund to the Commission the
23 amount of the scholarship received.

24 (i) The Commission shall administer the Merit Recognition
25 Scholarship program established by this Section and shall make
26 all necessary and proper rules, not inconsistent with this

1 Section, for its effective implementation.

2 (j) When an appropriation to the Commission for purposes of
3 this Section is insufficient to provide scholarships to all
4 qualified students, the Commission shall allocate the
5 appropriation in accordance with this subsection (j). If funds
6 are insufficient to provide all qualified students with a
7 scholarship as authorized by subsection (g) of this Section,
8 the Commission shall allocate the scholarships to qualified
9 students in order of decreasing relative academic rank, as
10 determined by the Commission using a formula based upon the
11 qualified student's grade point average, score on the
12 appropriate statewide standardized examination, or a
13 combination of grade point average and standardized test score.
14 All Merit Recognition Scholarships awarded shall be in the
15 amount of \$1,000.

16 (k) The Commission, in determining the number of Merit
17 Recognition Scholarships to be offered pursuant to subsection
18 (j) of this Section, shall take into consideration past
19 experience with the rate of merit scholarship funds unclaimed
20 by qualified students. To the extent necessary to avoid an
21 over-commitment of funds, the Commission may allocate
22 scholarship funds on the basis of the date the Commission
23 receives a completed application form.

24 (Source: P.A. 91-128, eff. 7-1-00.)