

CAPITOL OFFICE
1021 O STREET, SUITE 7630
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814
TEL (916) 651-4018
FAX (916) 651-4918

SAN DIEGO COUNTY DISTRICT OFFICE
780 BAY BOULEVARD, SUITE 204
CHULA VISTA, CA 91910
TEL (619) 409-7690

IMPERIAL COUNTY DISTRICT OFFICE
1224 STATE STREET, SUITE D
EL CENTRO, CA 92243
TEL (760) 335-3442

RIVERSIDE COUNTY DISTRICT OFFICE
82013 DR. CARREON BOULEVARD, SUITE J
INDIO, CA 92201
TEL (760) 398-6442

WWW.SENATE.CA.GOV/PADILLA
SENATOR.PADILLA@SENATE.CA.GOV

California State Senate

SENATOR
STEPHEN C. PADILLA
EIGHTEENTH SENATE DISTRICT



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SB 1006 – Cal Grant Access Award Amounts

The Cal Grant program has helped California’s students cover the cost of college for more than 50 years, yet its support for non-tuition expenses has failed to keep pace with rising costs. While Cal Grant awards for tuition at UC and CSU campuses have grown with statewide increases, the maximum Cal Grant B access award that helps students pay for non-tuition college essentials such as housing, food, transportation and books, remain at just \$1,648 per year. In 1969, the amount was set to \$900 and has not kept up with inflation – in fact, it is currently worth less than one-fifth of its original value. Non-tuition costs now make up a majority of college expenses, often exceeding \$30,000 annually for students living independently off campus. Even when combined with the maximum Pell Grant, less than one-third of average non-tuition costs are covered, contributing to widespread basic needs insecurity among college students. If the Cal Grant B had kept pace with inflation since its creation, it would exceed \$8,500 today. If it had grown at the same rate as tuition-based Cal Grants since 2000–01, it would exceed \$6,500, and if indexed to the California Consumer Price Index since then, it would surpass \$3,000.

Indexing non-tuition Cal Grant awards, which would mirror the treatment of Cal Grants that cover statewide public university tuition, would support equity across our higher education segments, benefiting students at all types of colleges and universities including the 38% of Cal Grant recipients who attend community colleges and the 69% who rely on Cal Grant B. Strengthening need-based aid for non-tuition costs supports students throughout the California higher education system, including the more than 100,000 students at CSUs and more than 12,000 students at UCs who receive a Cal Grant B. Eligible student parents and recent foster youth, who often incur high expenses and face additional affordability barriers, can also receive a supplemental access award that, when combined with the Cal Grant B access awards, provides up to a maximum of \$6,000 annually.

SB 1006 addresses this through incremental investments that will increase access award amounts for Cal Grant B recipients, whose incomes are typically so low that they don’t have the resources for college costs. Beginning in the 2027–28 academic year, the bill would set the Cal Grant B access award to at least the current AY 2025-26 maximum amount and require the award to automatically increase each year based on inflation, using the California Consumer Price Index. This change replaces the current fixed cap and ensures the award maintains its value over time, rather than falling further behind rising costs. SB 1006 strengthens the Cal Grant program to reduce reliance on excessive work or debt, improve full-time enrollment, and complement the state’s broader efforts to address basic needs and college affordability through investments in housing and academic supplies.

Staff Contact

Name: Mitul Kalra
Title: Legislative Aide
Email: Mitul.Kalra@sen.ca.gov
Capitol Office: (916) 651 – 4018

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