2025-2026 General Assembly

SENATE BILL 257: 2026 Appropriations Act, Sec. 6.6: High-Cost Workforce Programs Start-Up Funds

Analysis of: S.L. 2026-41, Sec. 6.6

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Section 6.6 of S.L. 2026-41 (Senate Bill 257) requires the Community Colleges System Office (CCSO) to establish a Fund for High-Cost Workforce Programs (Fund) to assist community colleges in starting new programs in high-demand career fields that require significant start-up funds. Programs offered at community colleges aligned with high-salary and high-demand workforce sectors are eligible for funds from the Fund.

The CCSO must develop an application process for community colleges to apply for awards from the Fund by the beginning of the 2026-2027 academic year, which must include (i) a description of the proposed new program requiring start-up funds, (ii) documentation of industry demand for the program or documentation of local, regional, or statewide employment needs that will be met by the program, (iii) total cash costs to start and maintain the program over two fiscal years, and (iv) a plan for the fiscal sustainability of the new program.

Each college can only apply for one award in a fiscal year and can use the funds received over two fiscal years. A college receiving funds must provide a match with non-State funds, as follows:

- Community colleges with a total of more than 6,500 full-time equivalents must match 15%.
- Community colleges with a total between 2,500 and 6,500 full-time equivalents must match 10%.
- Community colleges with a total of fewer than 2,500 full-time equivalents must match 5%.

The CCSO can adopt policies regarding the administration of the Fund and can use up to $100,000 for the administrative costs for the 2026-2027 fiscal year.

By December 1 after each year funds are provided to a college from the Fund, the CCSO must report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on (i) the colleges that received the funds, the amount of funds, and the types of programs started, (ii) the use of funds, including costs associated with student instruction, faculty salaries, instructional supplies, related instructional equipment, and accreditation costs, and (iii) evaluation of the success of the new programs. The first report is due December 1, 2027.

This section became effective July 1, 2026.