DIGEST

Henry Burns   HB No. 945

Abstract: Extends eligibility for TOPS awards for certain students who reenlist in the U. S. Armed Forces and maintain continuous active duty.

Present law provides for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) as a program of merit scholarships (TOPS-Tech, Opportunity, Performance, and Honors awards) for first time freshman attending La. public postsecondary institutions, regionally accredited independent colleges and universities in La., or certain out-of-state nonpublic postsecondary institutions who meet a specified GPA, ACT/SAT score, and core curriculum requirements, and certain other qualifications.

INITIAL ELIGIBILITY

Present law requires that a student enroll in an eligible college or university as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the first anniversary of the date that the student graduated from an eligible high school or completed the 12th grade level of a BESE-approved home study program.

Proposed law retains present law.

Present law further provides that if the student joins the U. S. Armed Forces within one year after graduating from high school, the student must enroll in an eligible college or university as a first-time freshman not later than the semester, excluding summer semesters or sessions, immediately following the fifth anniversary of the date of high school graduation or completion of the home study program.

Proposed law retains present law. However, effective from the 1996-1997 school year and thereafter, proposed law additionally provides that if, on or prior to the fifth anniversary of high school graduation or completion of the home study program, the student reenlists in the U. S. Armed Forces and maintains continuous active duty, the five-year period shall be extended to the semester immediately following the one year anniversary of the student's separation from active duty service.

MAINTAIN CONTINUING ELIGIBILITY

Present law provides that, once enrolled in college, if at any time a student fails to maintain the cumulative GPA required for continuation in the program or as of the end of any semester or

term during the academic year fails to make steady academic progress, such student becomes ineligible for further TOPS payments. Further provides that certain payments may be reinstated upon attainment of the required GPA, provided that the student has maintained other continuation requirements and the period of ineligibility did not persist for more than two years from the date of loss of eligibility for an Opportunity, Performance or Honors award. For a TOPS-Tech Award, provides that payments may be reinstated upon attainment of the required GPA, provided that the student has maintained other continuation requirements and the period of ineligibility did not persist for more than one year from the date of loss of eligibility. Proposed law retains present law.

Present law provides that if such period of ineligibility is interrupted due to a student's active duty service in the U. S. Armed Forces, the period will be extended for a length of time equal to the student's active duty service, not to exceed four years.

Proposed law generally retains present law, but extends the four year length of time for a student who is on active duty, if the student reenlists in the U. S. Armed Forces and maintains continuous active duty, in which case the period will be extended for a length of time equal to the student's active duty service; or unless the student is granted an exception for cause by the administering agency.

Effective upon signature of the governor or lapse of time for gubernatorial action.

(Amends R.S. 17:3048.1(A)(1)(b)(i), (c)(i), (d)(i) and (4)(a)(iii), (B)(3)(a), (P)(1)(c), (2)(b), (3)(b) and (4)(b), (Q)(1)(d), and (V)(1)(c))