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HOUSE BILL NO. 2231

Offered January 13, 2025

Prefiled January 7, 2025

A *BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 22.1-199.8, relating to public schools; Virginia Opportunity Scholarship Grant Program established.*

Patron—Cherry

Referred to Committee on Appropriations

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 22.1-199.8 as follows:

§ 22.1-199.8. Virginia Opportunity Scholarship Grant Program established; guidelines.

A. *With such funds as may be appropriated for such purpose pursuant to the general appropriation act, the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship Grant Program (the Program) is established for the purpose of ensuring that all children in the Commonwealth have access to quality educational opportunities by awarding each eligible student an annual grant to support qualified educational expenses.*

B. *Beginning with the fiscal year starting on July 1, 2026, any student shall be eligible to annually apply to receive a grant in the amount of \$5,000 under this section who (i) is a resident of the Commonwealth, (ii) is eligible to enroll in a public elementary or secondary school in the Commonwealth and (a) attends a public elementary or secondary school in the Commonwealth for at least one school year immediately preceding the semester or term for which the student initially applies for the Program or (b) would be starting kindergarten or entering first grade at a public elementary school in the Commonwealth, and (iii) is a member of a household with an income that does not exceed twice the federal income eligibility limit to receive free school meals through participation in the School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The amount of grants awarded under this section for any given year shall not exceed an amount equal to one \$5,000 grant per eligible student for up to 10,000 eligible students.*

C. *Grant funds awarded under this section shall be used to support qualified educational expenses of attending an accredited private school in the Commonwealth, including (i) tuition and fees, (ii) textbooks and other curricular materials, (iii) uniforms, (iv) transportation to and from home and school, and (v) other qualified educational expenses as defined in the Program guidelines developed pursuant to subsection D.*

D. *The Board shall, in collaboration with the Department of the Treasury, develop Program guidelines for the implementation and administration of the Program. Such guidelines shall include (i) Program eligibility requirements, (ii) application submission and review policies and procedures, (iii) administrative requirements for the Program, and (iv) guidance on permissible qualified educational expenses for which grants awarded under this section may be used. The Department of the Treasury shall administer and manage the Program, in accordance with the Program guidelines and subject to the authority of the Board to provide for the disbursement of grants under this section. The Board shall disburse annual grants to eligible students in accordance with the provisions of subsection B.*

E. *The Board shall develop and make available to each school board informational materials for ensuring that students and parents are aware of the Program and the opportunity to receive a grant pursuant to the Program. Such informational materials shall include guidance on determining the eligibility of students for participation in the Program and on applying to receive a scholarship pursuant to the Program. Each school board shall make available such informational materials to the parent of each student enrolled in the school division at the start of each school year.*

F. *The Department shall annually collect data on and include as a part of the Board's Annual Report on the Condition and Needs of Public Schools in Virginia the total student participation in the Program, disaggregated by Superintendent's region.*

G. *Grant funds awarded under this section shall not be considered taxable income to the parent.*

INTRODUCED

HB2231