

**Joint Committee on Higher Education Bill  
Summary**

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<b><u>BILL NUMBER</u></b>	S.921
<b><u>TITLE</u></b>	An Act to facilitate student financial assistance
<b><u>SPONSORS</u></b>	Senator Comerford
<b><u>SIMILAR MATTERS</u></b>	H.1467
<b><u>PRIOR HISTORY</u></b>	H.1367 of the 2021-22 Legislative Session was given a favorable report by the Joint Committee on Higher Education and sent to House Ways and Means, no further action. H.1294 of the 2023/2024 Legislative Session was given a favorable report with a redraft (see H.2469); H.4269 was sent to House Ways and Means; no further action.

**SUMMARY**

This bill requires all high school students to complete the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA), unless an eligible student, their parent or guardian, or the school district submits a waiver. It also requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to provide guidance to school districts to assist school staff and administrators with implementing this new requirement. The bill sets up a FAFSA Trust Fund to support DESE's work under this act, enabling the department to expend funds for related staff training, workshops, and community collaborations.

**SECTION-BY-SECTION**

**Section 1:**

- (a) Declares it a policy of the commonwealth to maximize financial aid options for graduating students. Requires all graduating high school students to submit a FAFSA.
- (b) Students will not be required to comply with the FAFSA requirement if a form (described in (c)) is completed. The form may be signed by:
- A parent or guardian authorizing their student to decline completion
  - A student who is over 18 or emancipated legally
  - A school district on behalf of a student under 18 who can attest that the student has met all other graduation requirements and has unsuccessfully made good faith efforts to contact their family in at least 3 unique ways in the family's preferred language
- (c) DESE must develop the form required by (b) which must be accessible, translated into different languages, and requires no personal/citizenship information other than names and signatures. School districts must ensure that all students comply with these provisions prior to completion of high school.

(d) The commissioner shall provide guidance necessary for the implementation of this requirement. School districts must submit annual reports to DESE detailing the number of students who comply or receive exemptions.

**Section 2:**

(a) Establishes the FAFSA Trust Fund, administered by DESE, to assist with implementation initiatives.

(b) The fund may focus on underserved communities. Funds may be used for implementation, training, workshops, and community collaboration to support students, parents, and guardians.

(c) Funding is subject to DESE's review such that DESE shall ensure no funds deposited are subject to conditions that may be detrimental to students, schools, parents, etc.

(d) DESE shall submit annual reports on this initiative to the Legislature.

**Section 3-4: Effective Dates.**