

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**Eightieth Session
February 26, 2019**

The Committee on Education was called to order by Chairman Tyrone Thompson at 1:33 p.m. on Tuesday, February 26, 2019, in Room 3138 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda ([Exhibit A](#)), the Attendance Roster ([Exhibit B](#)), and other substantive exhibits, are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website at www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/80th2019.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson, Chairman
Assemblyman Edgar Flores, Vice Chairman
Assemblywoman Bea Duran
Assemblywoman Michelle Gorelow
Assemblywoman Alexis Hansen
Assemblywoman Melissa Hardy
Assemblywoman Lisa Krasner
Assemblywoman Brittney Miller
Assemblywoman Connie Munk
Assemblywoman Sarah Peters
Assemblywoman Jill Tolles
Assemblywoman Selena Torres

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

None

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kelly Richard, Committee Policy Analyst
Victoria Gonzalez, Committee Counsel
Sharon McCallen, Committee Secretary
Trinity Thom, Committee Assistant



OTHERS PRESENT:

Tammy Thieman, Senior Manager, Amazon Career Choice
Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of
Higher Education
Andrew Sierra, President, Associated Students of the College of Southern Nevada
Manuel Ayala, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada
Jacob Narvaez, Senator, Associated Students of the College of Southern Nevada
J. Kyle Dalpe, Interim Executive Director of Legislative Affairs, Nevada System of
Higher Education
Anthony Ruiz, Senior Advisor for Government Relations and Community Affairs
representing Nevada State College, Henderson, Nevada
Chris Daly, Deputy Executive Director, Government Relations, Nevada State
Education Association
Jim Sullivan, representing Culinary Workers Union, Local 226
John J. Piro, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada
Maria Nieto, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada
Ericka Castro, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada
Scott A. Sabraw, representing Clark County Educational Association
Kent M. Ervin, Legislative Liaison, Nevada Faculty Alliance

Chairman Thompson:

[Roll was called. Committee protocol and rules were explained.] This is Nevada Reading Week. We value literacy in our communities, and we need to make sure that our young people are reading. If you have not already, all of you need to talk to a school in your neighborhood and say, "Hey, I want to come and read to the kids," or the other way around where the kids can read to you. That creates the culture of literacy that we love. We do this every year, usually the last week of February into the first week of March. We are offering Skype for you to Skype in to a school in your district and read to the little ones. Some of our colleagues have come to me and said that it was a great experience. If you can do that, it would be great using modern technology.

Today we have a presentation concerning workforce development programs from Amazon and then we will have a hearing on Assembly Bill 155. First, we will open for public comment. [There was none.]

Tammy Thieman, Senior Manager, Amazon Career Choice:

Career Choice is Amazon's hourly associate upskill program. Previous to this role, I led the team that developed Amazon's technical apprenticeship program focused initially on military veterans. I want to share some of the interesting work that Amazon is doing in the workforce development space. You might be interested to know that since 2011, Amazon has invested more than \$1 billion in Nevada, which includes fulfillment infrastructure, research facilities, and now hubs in North Las Vegas, Reno, and Las Vegas. We have created more than 4,500 full-time jobs in Nevada, and we continue to hire. More than 19,000 authors, small and

medium-sized businesses, and developers are growing their businesses using Amazon products and services.

Many of you recognize the challenges governments and businesses face in upskilling today's workforce. I am excited to share with you some of the ways that Amazon is helping to solve this problem. I will begin by sharing our employee upskill program. This is a global program that was developed by Amazon to help prepare our hourly employees for in-demand careers at Amazon or elsewhere. Our technical apprenticeship program pairs instructor-led training and on-the-job training to prepare apprentices for roles in cloud computing.

As Amazon continues to grow and attract talent globally, we recognize that some of our hourly employees will choose to build a career at Amazon, yet for others, a job at Amazon will be a springboard to a new career in another industry. Our upskill program was invented to expand our employee's options. Much like Amazon, the program has grown significantly over the past few years. Career Choice was first launched in the United States in 2012. Today the program is available in an additional 12 countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, South Africa, and Slovakia.

Our first student, Sabrina, was an hourly employee at one of our fulfillment centers in Lexington, Kentucky. Since then, more than 20,000 associates around the world have joined the program [page 2, ([Exhibit C](#))].

This is how the program works [page 3]: Amazon prepays 95 percent of tuition for vocational and technical studies in in-demand fields over a four-year period of time. We pay the cost in advance to remove the financial constraints of going back to school. This program offers Amazon a unique way to draw and retain great talent while providing our employees a gateway to viable careers. Dana, who is pictured here, joined the program after working in one of our fulfillment centers in Pennsylvania. She now works as a registered nurse in her local community. In her words, Career Choice opened the door to a career she had always wanted to pursue. By offering career options, we empower our employees to own their career development. What makes us unique is that we focus on the skill development of our associates to pursue their passion, even though that passion may lead to an opportunity outside of Amazon.

Amazon is customer-obsessed. We work to provide an outstanding customer experience and expand the selection of benefits we offer customers. Similarly, with our upskill program, we aim to give employees an outstanding experience that increases career opportunities in today's market. That is why we exclusively fund fields of study that are in demand, well paid, and offer career progression opportunities [page 4]. We customize our fields of study by drawing on reliable national and local labor market statistics. Today, our students are preparing for exciting new careers in information technology (IT), health care, advanced manufacturing, among others. We want to help our employees get a leg up in their career development and support our local economies where we operate.

Working adult learners can encounter numerous barriers when they go back to school [Video 1, ([Exhibit C](#))]. To eliminate some of those challenges, we have integrated unique

features in our program, like on-site classrooms. Amazon has over 50 fulfillment centers with on-site classrooms. These fishbowl style rooms inspire new Amazonians to enroll in Career Choice. More importantly, the classrooms allow our employees to pursue education at the workplace while eliminating the commute to and from school. We recognize that our associates lead busy lives. Some of our employees will have fixed class schedules that will conflict with their work commitment. That is why we have introduced a school accommodation policy that offers flexibility to meet the work and school schedule.

As our employees reach graduation, we offer career readiness resources—courses such as interview preparation, and résumé writing. These classes give our employees the hard and soft skills needed to take the next step in their career journey.

Jamie was an employee at one of our fulfillment centers in California who found and followed her passion to a rewarding career with the American Red Cross [Video 2, [Exhibit C](#)]. That is how we measure success—not by traditional recruitment and retention metrics, but rather when our employees complete their education and move to an in-demand career. That, for us, is success. We aim to create this continuous flywheel that recruits, educates, and transitions our employees into well-paid and in-demand jobs in the community.

The road ahead involves continued partnership with governments, educational providers, and businesses [page 7]. Governments can encourage closer alignment between the business community's need for skilled talent and the curriculum delivered by educators. Creative and agile education providers need to offer first-in-class training that aligns with today's job market needs. Business provides critical insight to the credentials that they value. We seek to create talent pipelines for those organizations that have ongoing needs for talent. By upskilling our employees for available roles with hiring companies, we are helping transition our participants into middle skill careers while supporting the broader community to close the skill/talent gap.

Not only does Amazon leverage innovative programs to help our associates find new careers outside of Amazon, we are leveraging innovative ways to create opportunities and pathways into Amazon. One example of this is Amazon's technical apprenticeship program. As part of our commitment to hiring diverse perspectives, Amazon made a commitment to hire 25,000 veterans by 2021. An important part of this commitment is the way we infuse veteran talent across the entire organization and not just in pockets. For example, there is a very natural fit for military logisticians and operators to fill leadership roles across our fulfillment center network. However, the fit is not as natural for many of our technology roles. In many cases while our veterans have great technical experience and aptitude, they may not have the right level of exposure or experience for a technical role in Amazon. In 2017, Amazon registered with the Department of Labor as an apprenticeship provider. Amazon's technical apprenticeship program was designed to bridge the technical skill gap that exists between service member's technical experience in the military and the skills they need to get hired with Amazon [page 8].

Apprenticeship is a training model that combines instructor-led training coupled with experiential learning that takes place on the job under the supervision of a more experienced worker.

You are probably familiar with this model as it is commonly used in the trades. Amazon is pioneering this model which has been a success in the trade for over 100 years and is now applying it to the IT sector. The benefit of this model is that we are creating a new pipeline of talent for many of our high-volume technical roles, while simultaneously providing opportunities for veterans to leverage skills that they learned in the military to access in-demand jobs in the IT sector, without—most importantly—having to go back for a four-year computer science degree. We are currently leveraging apprenticeship for several roles, spanning from data center technicians all the way to software development engineers in eight different locations across the United States. With the success of the model, we have expanded beyond veteran candidates with the goal of giving more candidates access to roles at Amazon.

I would love for you to hear from one of our apprentices who just recently transitioned from the Amazon technical apprenticeship program to a full-time cloud support associate role [Video 3, ([Exhibit C](#))].

Thank you so much for letting me share these programs that we are passionate and excited about.

Assemblyman Flores:

Do you have data on how many Nevadans have benefited from these programs? Specifically, if you do, do you have data regarding how many went on to full-time employment versus part-time employment?

Tammy Thieman:

Currently in Nevada, there are 3,000 eligible associates for the upskill program, Career Choice.

Assemblyman Flores:

As a point of clarification, 3,000 are eligible? What does "eligible" mean. Where are they in this process?

Tammy Thieman:

Our associates are eligible for our Career Choice program after one year of employment with Amazon. We currently have 3,000 in the state of Nevada who are eligible. A large portion of those who are participating in the program are participating in our health care program, IT program, mechanical skills trade, transportation, and paralegal programs.

Assemblyman Flores:

Typically, how long do those programs last?

Tammy Thieman:

It is varied. We work to backwards map our education to our employers. We look to provide industry-recognized certifications and degrees that are valuable in the marketplace. It depends on the field of study—for instance a commercial driver's license certification can be as short as 16 weeks, whereas an IT certification could last upwards of 25 weeks. When you start moving into health care you could be spending two years. We are trying to provide education that leads directly to jobs.

Assemblywoman Miller:

When referring to all of these jobs, can you tell us what the actual jobs are that you are referring to?

Tammy Thieman:

I can give you some examples. We have a program specifically in the Dallas, Texas, area that takes folks through an advanced manufacturing certification that prepares them to work on manufacturing of airplanes. Those lead to very specific roles in the Dallas, Texas, area around airplane manufacturing. We work very hard to localize those programs with local employers. We have an entire employer outreach team that spends time connecting opportunities with our local community, then backwards mapping education that is delivered either nationally or locally by our community colleges.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Can you explain what is specifically happening here in Nevada? When you are referring to 3,000 positions, could you explain exactly what is happening in Nevada when it comes to the actual jobs that our Nevadans are filling?

Tammy Thieman:

Again, let me clarify. There are 3,000 eligible associates. That does not mean that all 3,000 are taking the program. What I can tell you is that in 2019—this year—we have folks who are enrolled in the College of Southern Nevada, in the Phlebotomy Learning Center of Las Vegas, and we have the Nevada Truck Driving School—again, leading to those specific roles that are aligned with that education.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Are these jobs or are these training programs?

Tammy Thieman:

We work to link our education programs to jobs. I cannot share the employer partners that I have here in Nevada. As it relates, the education leads directly to jobs. For instance, as someone is going through a program, we invite other employers onto our Amazon campus in our facilities to provide an information session about what a day in the life looks like and what it is like to work for that company. Then folks can apply directly to those employers.

Assemblywoman Miller:

If I were to fill out an application today, am I applying to work for Amazon, or am I applying for a training program from a vendor or an industry that works with Amazon? What is my day actually going to look like?

Tammy Thieman:

Let me walk you through that. You would be an Amazon employee. We would tell you the full suite of programs that we have in your local area. Again, that is regionally specific. We would share with you the current education programs and the employers these education programs link to. You can enroll in this program. Generally, at the beginning of the program, we would bring in employers in to tell you what the job would look like, how it feels, and what a day in the life looks like. You would decide if you were excited about being a commercial truck driver, for example. You would enroll in the course. If you successfully pass the course and receive the appropriate certification, you would have an opportunity to then apply. We would help you with résumé writing skills, ensuring that you get to apply. We have certain employers who have dedicated Amazon lines that you can call and get information. The critical thing about this program that is so exciting—and what I am so excited about—is that it leads to in-demand jobs. These are roles in which our employers are saying they cannot find all of the talent they need. We are helping fill those gaps. Those employers are eager to come to our fulfillment centers and share with us.

Assemblywoman Miller:

So these are not actually jobs then. While I am being trained to become a driver, I am not getting paid by Amazon? Is that correct?

Tammy Thieman:

You are working in our fulfillment center. You are going to school and working simultaneously, yes.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Will an applicant apply for the position?

Tammy Thieman:

Which position are you talking about?

Assemblywoman Miller:

I am applying to Amazon. Through some services, I will determine which training program I am best suited for. I go through the training, and if I successfully complete that training, then Amazon will help me apply for an actual job? You are referring to a fulfillment center, but while I am in this training program, am I getting paid?

Tammy Thieman:

You are an Amazon employee as a fulfillment center worker—an hourly employee of Amazon. As a benefit of your employment, you have the opportunity to participate in this upskill program. You would simultaneously go to work and study. Amazon would cover up to 95 percent of the cost of that education.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Can I choose not to be in the training program and just work as an employee?

Tammy Thieman:

Of course. Absolutely. Maybe I am misunderstanding what your question is. What I am sharing with you is an employee benefit program for all Amazon employees. In order to qualify for this program, you would have to be an Amazon employee. The interesting thing about this program is, you have an opportunity to get hired, and you are working full time, but then you also have an opportunity to train for a new role outside of Amazon.

Assemblywoman Miller:

That explains it better, and I understand that this is a benefit to your employees—training opportunities. What are the jobs that Nevadans are actually doing?

Tammy Thieman:

We have myriad jobs in our local fulfillment centers, and we have five across the state. I am not here to share specifically about the job openings that are currently here in Nevada. What I am here to share is that for those people who are employees of Amazon, there are some really interesting and beneficial programs that we can offer them.

Assemblywoman Miller:

I understand that your presentation is based on the benefits, but I am looking at employment. I understand, and I do not expect anyone to share all of the different job openings, but again, I would just like to hear what jobs are here for our Nevadans. If we are going to refer people and say that Amazon is a great company to go to, what am I sharing further to people? There opportunities in which fields? What types of jobs? What would you be doing? To be quite honest, when I think of Amazon, I picture people in a warehouse filling orders. That is great if that is what the jobs entail, but there is something more that I am missing. What is happening here in Nevada?

Tammy Thieman:

I am happy to provide a follow-up with you to make sure you have an understanding of the roles that are available here in Nevada. Certainly, my expertise is around opportunities for upskilling.

Assemblywoman Torres:

You have spoken about how 3,000 individuals qualify or are eligible for the program. Do we have a number of people who are going into the program? I would also like to know about the cost of that for the individuals receiving the education.

Tammy Thieman:

Again, currently we have 3,000 eligible associates and the cost is program-specific. The great thing that Amazon offers is that it pays up to 95 percent of the program. There is an annual program cap of up to \$12,000.

Assemblywoman Torres:

You might not have this information today, but my specific question is regarding how much money is going into the state of Nevada for these programs specifically. Additionally, how many individuals—you said 3,000 are eligible, which does not mean that 3,000 individuals are in the program—I want to have an understanding of how many people are in the program and what programs they are studying. That would help this entire Committee clarify some of the different things being said throughout your presentation.

Tammy Thieman:

We can certainly follow up on those questions. The idea is that because this is a benefit, we offer it to our associates and they have the opportunity to take advantage of that. We can get you more specifics if you are needing those.

Assemblywoman Torres:

That is phenomenal, but as a Nevada legislator, I want to see how that is benefiting the state of Nevada. We look forward to that information.

Assemblywoman Tolles:

It is amazing that a company would voluntarily offer this as a benefit to their employees, knowing that the end result might be that the employee leaves and goes on to become a nurse or a truck driver. It is amazing that you are willing to do that. We have many conversations in this building about how to help our Nevada families make a living, to step up and upskill, and to enter into higher career opportunities and economic prosperity. I am interested in how you have developed this program. It is my understanding that you receive no benefits or exchange from the state of Nevada. This is purely a public-private partnership for the benefit of your employees. Is that correct?

Tammy Thieman:

Yes, it is a benefit. We offer this not only in the United States, but globally in 13 countries. We work with a public partnership and a private partnership to deliver this program across the world.

Assemblywoman Tolles:

Are you aware of ways that states have partnered with businesses like yours to encourage this type of program as a benefit to their employees? I do think it addresses the underemployed adult working population in a very unique way. If you have any models from other states that you could present, I would appreciate more information on how we as a state can help encourage the different programs.

Tammy Thieman:

We partner with the National Association of Workforce Boards and we partner very closely with community colleges to go after, at its core, how we link education and employers. We leverage those organizations to ensure we are connecting with those employers who do have in-demand roles, and we are leveraging our community colleges to make those introductions

as well. We find that leveraging those community organizations is the key to our success to deliver this nationally.

Assemblywoman Tolles:

As far as you are aware, there are no tax trade-off benefits; for example, where somebody could get an abatement on a payroll tax and use that toward paying for this benefit for their employees—there is no exchange like that? It is all solely voluntary in all of the states you are involved in. Is that correct?

Tammy Thieman:

We manage this program centrally, then we engage our community partners. I am not personally aware of any tax benefit that we receive. I can certainly follow that up.

Assemblywoman Peters:

One of the clarifying comments would be to give us an idea of how you build partnerships with the schools or educational programs. It sounds like you have a couple of programs in public schools and in the state schools, but you also partner with private programs with certifications or associate degrees. How do those work? Do you have an agreement with those schools to pay the 95 percent for those four years, like a \$3,000 cap per year per program? Do you have requirements for how many credits the students take? Can you clarify how those partnerships work with the schools? It sounds pretty unique.

Tammy Thieman:

We work pretty organically, but to give you an understanding of scale we currently partner with over 1,400 training institutions. We have a program team that works very closely together. We engage both ends of the funnel. We have a team that is working with employers to identify what those high-demand roles are regionally. It is simple conversations that say, What are the certifications that you value? What is the training you value? If there is any need to address that training, that is when we have those conversations at the community college, which says to them that they have this program, but we need to make some tweaks, and is that something they can help us do. We found with community colleges that they are very responsive to ensuring that their education aligns with industry.

Conversely, when we look at our education partners—we partner with many schools and we know where our students are going, and our education partners are actually very proactive in reaching out to us knowing that this program exists—they want to partner with us. We have a group of partners where we say that we want to continue to send associates to your school for this program, and we start looking for employer partners that would value that program.

The third arm is we do have associates who come to us and tell us they would like to attend this program. There are three prongs that lead into how we manage and work through all of this. It is educational-led, employer-led, and associate-led. We are trying to piece all of those things together. There are program teams within the United States and in Europe helping to put all of those dots together in a meaningful, close-linked system that helps us engage to both our educators as well as our employers. Does that answer your question?

Assemblywoman Peters:

Yes. The only part I would request a little more information on is how you work out the payment plans. You say "prepay," not knowing how many classes the student is going into; do you build that with the educational program? How does that engagement work?

Tammy Thieman:

We have a voucher system. An associate applies to the Career Choice program through Amazon and simultaneously applies to the school. When we validate that they have that benefit available to them, it generates a voucher that they take to the school. The school resubmits to Amazon for payment. That is the current system in which we pay our community education partners.

Assemblywoman Peters:

That answers my question. I was confused on what "prepay" means. That is not the same definition I use for prepay. I appreciate this. I have a number of friends who have worked with Amazon, and they felt the ceiling with Amazon and wanted to move into something that had a ladder for progressing from a warehouse job. They had to pay out-of-pocket themselves or choose to move into a different industry in which they might not make as much money just to be able to move into a different career. This sounds like a great program and fills a need.

I was also looking at your website and it looks like the program has doubled in the last two years. That is pretty phenomenal as well.

Tammy Thieman:

We are seeing incredible growth. I do want to clarify that the voucher actually happens before class ever starts. Amazon pays the school before the class starts. Even though it is a voucher system, the class is paid for before a student starts their education, so no money comes out of the pocket of the students except for the remaining 5 percent.

Chairman Thompson:

I have a question regarding the slide that talks about registered apprenticeship [page 8, [Exhibit C](#)]. Can you share with us, is this a bona fide apprenticeship that is acknowledged through the Department of Labor. If so, do you work with the Office of Workforce Innovation (OWINN) within the Office of the Governor? They are truly working with the apprenticeships across the state.

Tammy Thieman:

I am happy to make the connection of the team for apprenticeship. We are running apprenticeships nationally, and to answer your question, we have registered with the Department of Labor; it is a Department of Labor registered apprenticeship which includes specific education requirements as well as specific benchmarks. I am happy to make sure that OWINN is connected with the team.

Assemblyman Flores:

Because we are so Nevada-centric, we are trying to figure who the Nevada partners are. Because the presentation was so broad, it was hard for us to understand when you said partners, did you mean national partners? Nevada partners? You mentioned you could not share some of that. Could you send me a list of who are these partners you have? An actual name? What community colleges are you specifically working with? What programs do you have directly? What is that pipeline? Your presentation was very broad and it was hard for us to know what we are going to take to our constituents when we talk about this program. For example, I have a constituent who tells me that they want to go to work for Amazon, but I want to be able to use that as a stepping stone. It is hard for us to tell them that these pipelines are available because we do not know who those partners are.

Tammy Thieman:

The presentation was to give you an overview. There are a few different things. One is that when talking to your constituents, you want to be aware that there are some great benefits through Amazon. It is not just getting to have a full-time job and receiving compensation for that role, but there are also really interesting benefits that come along with that, like our Career Choice program.

Secondarily, I would say, if you have employers in the state who are trying to figure out how to fill their high-demand roles that lead to those middle-skill jobs, we want to partner with them. We would love the connection because we have people who we are training and are paying to train, and we would love to fill those pipelines for your employers. We would certainly ask for those connections as well because we are supplying labor for those middle skill roles.

Chairman Thompson:

Thank you for the presentation. Again, I think you have heard from the Committee that we really want to help you connect so we can connect with the partners, so we can connect with our community and our constituents so they can benefit from all the apprenticeship programs that you offer. We will close our presentation and open the hearing for Assembly Bill 155.

Assembly Bill 155: Revises provisions governing the eligibility requirements for grants awarded under the Silver State Opportunity Grant Program. (BDR 34-674)

Assemblywoman Selena Torres, Assembly District No. 3:

I am here today to present Assembly Bill 155, which proposes several changes to the Silver State Opportunity Grant Program (SSOG). The intent of this bill is to provide financial assistance to full-time students who demonstrate need and attend a state college or a community college.

Before I discuss the provisions of the bill, I want to give a little background on the Silver State Opportunity Grant Program in Nevada. I know that Vice Chancellor Crystal Abba will give more information as well.

The Silver State Opportunity Grant Program is Nevada's first state-supported, need-based financial aid program ([Exhibit D](#)). The program was created by the 2015 Legislature as a pilot [[Senate Bill 227 of the 78th Session](#)] and became a part of the approved *Executive Budget* in 2017. During the first three years of the program, approximately 3,873 students received financial assistance through the program. Based on preliminary data, during the fourth year the program was serving 1,518 students. [Assembly Bill 155](#) aims to provide some flexibility for hardships and issues that arise when a student is completing the requirements for their degree.

I know you might have the original version of the bill in front of you but I would like you to look at the amended version of the bill ([Exhibit E](#)) because that is the one we will be discussing and reviewing today. After meeting with members of the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE), we made various changes to the bill so that it is the strongest piece of legislation we could put before the Assembly Committee on Education to date.

This bill makes the following revisions to the program: It reduces the minimum number of credit hours for which a student must be enrolled to remain eligible from 15 to 12 hours per semester. In doing so, Nevada continues to align with the federal definition of a full-time student. A student may be enrolled in fewer than 12 credit hours and maintain eligibility if the student is enrolled in his or her final semester of study. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for a student to regain eligibility if the student is enrolled in 12 credit hours for the present semester.

The proposed amendments to the Silver State Opportunity Grant recognize that not all students' chances of earning a degree are improved by taking a course load of 15 hours. For students who are managing full-time jobs and family obligations, a minimum of 15 hours each semester is a daunting task. Providing some flexibility while still maintaining full-time status recognizes the unique circumstances of students from diverse backgrounds, with varying degrees of support.

Today's students are parents. They are full-time employees. They are family caregivers. The proposed changes to the Silver State Opportunity Grant will provide the flexibility necessary for many nontraditional and low-income students to achieve their academic goals.

Throughout my undergraduate experience, I saw firsthand how difficult it was for many of my peers to juggle family, work, and school. I was fortunate that I did not have many significant obstacles that prevented me from taking a full load of courses or working full-time. I realized then, as I realize now, that I was the exception and not the rule. My peers are hardworking Nevada students who did not want to throw away their shot at a quality education. The NSHE and many other universities across the nation advise students to study two to three hours out of class for every credit hour taken. If we take that into consideration, every student who is taking 15 credits should be studying 30 to 45 hours a week out of class. This is an expectation that is simply unmanageable for many nontraditional students who are balancing family, work, school, and health. I do not miss my sleepless nights during my undergraduate years which were fueled by an abundance of

coffee, and no student should be required to sacrifice their well-being or that of their family to attend college.

At this time, I would like to introduce Crystal Abba, the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs for the Nevada System of Higher Education.

Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education:

I would like to state what a pleasure it is to be here with Assemblywoman Torres. I know this is the first bill that she is introducing, and it is an honor to be here with her today, especially on such an important issue.

Mr. Chairman, with your indulgence, on the Nevada Electronic Legislative Information System I have three slides ([Exhibit F](#)). I will not project them, but what these slides do, basically, is to allow me to walk the Committee through how the program works today, if you think that would be beneficial as a reminder to the older members as well as a 101 for new members.

Chairman Thompson:

Yes.

Crystal Abba:

As Assemblywoman Torres has already indicated, this program was created in the 2015 Legislative session with the bill that was sponsored by Senator Ben Kieckhefer and Senator Ruben Kihuen. It was based on a shared-responsibility model. What separates this program from other programs that are state supported, like the Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship and the Nevada Promise Scholarship program is that it is not based on the base registration fee. For example, at community colleges you pay a base registration fee of about \$95. It is not like the Millennium Scholarship in which you get \$40 per credit, or the "last dollar" scholarship program that fills in the gap after federal and other state aid. The SSOG is based on the total cost of attendance. When you look at the graphic on page 2, ([Exhibit F](#)), it basically means that what we are attempting to do is to make sure the state, the federal government through the Pell Grant awards, the family through the estimated family contribution (EFC) that is calculated by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and a reasonable student contribution all cover the total cost of attendance. That total cost of attendance is calculated. We use an average based on a federal methodology for each institution that is determined depending on living circumstances. For the current academic year for a student living off campus, the figure we start out with is \$21,118. That is the amount of money we are trying to make sure is covered.

Continuing on to page 3, in order to be eligible for the program—this is all outlined in state law, as it was enacted by this body in 2015—you have to be enrolled in 15 credits, which has been a point of controversy. I will explain the history on that. It mostly had to do with return on investment. In 2015, there were only two states without a need-based, state-supported financial aid program—Nevada and Massachusetts. I am pretty sure that Massachusetts as of

today is still the only state. We beat someone to being the last state. The reason for the 15 credits is that if you look at basically a straight line, there is a strong correlation between the number of credits that a student enrolls in and the likelihood of graduation. Because it was a pilot program, we wanted to be able to say to the state that the dollars being invested in this student will have a payback, not only for the student, but for the state as well in terms of students graduating from college with a degree or certificate of value. We were trying to give students enough money to incentivize them to take 15 credits so they could support themselves—not only pay the base registration fee, but pay those other expenses that fall under the total cost of attendance. That total cost of attendance calculation includes things like transportation expenses, room and board, and books and supplies. What we know in talking to low-income students in particular, is that they can often afford the base registration fee; what they cannot afford is to put gas in their vehicles so they can drive to school and be there on time for class. They cannot afford a bus pass; they cannot afford to put food on the table. What this does—between the Pell Grant, especially for those students who have a zero EFC, and the SSOG—for an academic year, they can have upwards of \$12,000 between two sources: the federal government and the state in the form of the SSOG. That was the ultimate goal.

Continuing on to who is eligible: In addition to taking 15 credits, you have to be enrolled in a program leading to a degree or a certificate. You have to be college ready. If you are placing into remediation, you will not qualify. You have to be a Nevada resident, and the key to all of this in terms of calculating the award amount, is that you have to complete the FAFSA. When you complete the FAFSA, the federal government gives us an EFC. The EFC is the expected family contribution. How much can your parents or your family reasonably contribute to your education? The sad thing to realize is that the majority of SSOG recipients have an EFC of zero. That means that their family cannot contribute a single penny to their education. They cannot help them put gas in the tank; they cannot help them put food on the table. That is why these low-income students do not go to school and why we have one of the lowest college participation rates in this country for students from low-income families attending community colleges. That was the problem we were trying to solve.

Continuing on to page 4 and the basic calculation, we start with that total cost of attendance—\$21,000 for living off campus, not with a parent. If you are living with your parent, it is about \$14,000. If you live on campus—that is except the Great Basin College or the Nevada State College which do not have dormitories—it is \$14,700. We start out with that amount, depending on what the student's living circumstances are. We subtract a student contribution. You will notice that a student contribution is \$5,500 which matches the maximum award for SSOG. The student is going to have some skin in the game, the same way the state is going to have skin in the game. With a calculation for coming up with that \$5,500 was an expectation that a student could reasonably work part-time over the summer and possibly put away \$5,500. That does not mean and we do not expect those students to write out a check for \$5,500. It is just a subtraction from the calculation in terms of an expectation that they are bringing something to the table in terms of covering the total cost of attendance. If they receive the Millennium Scholarship, a Rotary scholarship, or any type of

institutional or private aid, that would be part of that student contribution. We then subtract the expected family contribution and we subtract whatever they receive in terms of federal aid. The key and the beauty of that calculation—that last subtraction of the Pell Grant—is we make sure we are leveraging all available federal aid and that those students are availing themselves of before the SSOG fills in the gap up to \$5,500 toward the total cost of attendance.

We have a target population. That target population is zero EFC to \$8,500. If you have an \$8,500 EFC, you are going to get a Pell award, but it is going to be very small. The reason we aim from zero to \$8,500 is we were not only trying to get to the poorest of the poor at zero EFC, but we were trying to get to what we often refer to as the "working poor." Those are individuals who can contribute reasonably in terms of the FASFA calculation—something to their college education—but it is not enough to always make ends meet. We typically refer to them as the "working poor."

In the first two years of the program with the enactment of the pilot program, we received \$2.5 million for each year. In those first two years, we only served about 50 percent to 55 percent of students who were eligible. Clearly, we needed more money to serve all eligible students. In the 2017 Session, as Assemblywoman Torres indicated, it was included in our base budget at \$5 million; at this point, \$5 million has been adequate to cover all eligible students. That is the key to today's discussion. Understanding the fact that as we send a signal to students that we want to give you these funds, what we do not want to do—and that is always the challenge with these types of programs is that as you expand them—do you have the funding so that you do not set an expectation then is not met.

One thing to remember about A.B. 155 is if you will look at the fiscal note impact on page 1 of the bill it says no fiscal impact. Unfortunately, that is not accurate. Obviously, by expanding the program to 12 credits, you are going to serve more students. We know that there are more students out there taking 12 credits, especially at community colleges, than there are taking 15 credits. This is considered an expansion of the program. We will be submitting a fiscal note. I know that is not within the purview of this Committee and you would typically refer it to a money committee, but please be aware, we are in the process of calculating that figure now. I will tell you that we are running the numbers now of how many more students we are talking about here. Based on a first blush, looking at student-record level data for the 2016-2017 year, we believe it will be somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 students. In Year Three, we served approximately 1,700 students at 15 credits. That means we are going to be up, for all of the community colleges and the state college, around 4,200 students. I do not know right now the exact impact in terms of dollars. I will have that by the time this bill is referred to a money committee. However, please know that it is not going to be inexpensive. Basically, you are more than doubling the size of the program in terms of the students you are serving.

Continuing on to page 5, ([Exhibit F](#)) this gives you some actual examples based on the various living circumstances. Page 5 shows you the total EFC for the prior academic year, 2017-2018, was \$19,066 for a student who was living off campus without their parent. For

students from a very poor family with a zero EFC, they would get the maximum award of \$5,500. They would also receive a federal contribution in the form of a Pell Grant of \$5,900. Between those two sources, it is over \$11,000. Again, if they get the Millennium Scholarship and other sources of aid, that is in addition to this, which we would consider as going towards a reasonable student contribution. You can see that this varies here, so for the student who lives on campus but has a zero EFC, their award would be close to \$4,000.

That, Mr. Chairman, briefly explains the program and how it works. As Assemblywoman Torres indicated, there are two primary provisions in A.B. 155. One is bringing the program down to 12 credits. Part of the reason that number was a high of 2,000 to 2,500 students, remember, is that includes a student who might take 12 credits in the fall, and then does not take 12 credits in the spring. We count each student once, we do not count each student twice. It could include students who take 12 credits and 12 credits. It is any machination where we count them at least once in terms of our initial estimate, based on that 2016-2017 data.

One key provision in this bill is in section 1, subsection 5. It provides that for a student who is enrolled in fewer than 12 credits but is basically right at the finish line, we would not penalize them in terms of denying eligibility. We would say that you only need one more class. We want to fund you for just that one class. That language does not currently reside anywhere in statute. That has been one of the weaknesses of the program. We have students who get all of the way to their last semester, and every penny is critical, then we tell them, Oops! You are not in 15 credits; you are in 14 or 12, or 9. Unfortunately, that is the way the bill was originally written. I consider that a very important technical change.

Assemblywoman Tolles:

I have taught at the community college and at the university level for the past 13 years and have been so moved by my students who have qualified for these programs and have been first-generation college seekers. This has been life-changing for them. I appreciate this discussion. You answered some of my questions in terms of the fiscal note. Of course this would expand the eligibility. One of my questions harkens back to when this came up in the last session. Was there a consideration of keeping the ability of taking six credits during the summer? Ideally, the goal would still be able to get out of the community college program within two years, or in NSHE to get out in four years. They could still reach the overall goal, but not be forced to take the 15 credits in just the fall and the spring so that they could still be able to work and meet their family obligations, but still meet that end goal of completing within two years or four years respectively. I did not see that in this language. Is it still available as an option for students to meet that middle ground?

Assemblywoman Torres:

That is something under consideration in another bill, Senate Bill 146. They are looking at that model, but as the hearing from last Friday has shown, summer school is extremely expensive and the state would be required to fund summer school before that was even a possibility. Additionally, there is an additional burden on the student taking summer classes. The intent of the bill, as it is for this specific bill, is to allow nontraditional students

to continue to attend school. The summer school model does not necessarily work. Summer school classes are quick. They are generally four weeks—three hours a day in class—and with the expectation that you should be studying 15 hours a day outside of class to be successful in a summer school setting. I do not think that is realistic for many of our nontraditional students. I really think that the 12/12 model is what is best for Nevada kids and Nevada families in that it allows for students to continue taking a full-time load, as 12 credits is full time, and it does not put that additional burden on summer schools or require us to continue to fund summer school.

Crystal Abba:

May I add to that from an administrative standpoint? As Assemblywoman Torres indicated, there is Senate Bill 146 which is designed to do just that—allow students to be eligible if they enroll in 30 credits per year. I will tell you very honestly from an administrative standpoint, Assembly Bill 155 is a lot easier to administer. The challenge with the 12/12/6 model or the 12/15/3 model—or whatever combination of 30 credits you want to come up with, is that bill requires that students sign an academic plan. A student tells me they are going to take 30 credits: you take 12, you take 12, and then you do not show up for summer. Or maybe you take 12 credits, then you do not do the spring and you come back for the summer. You cannot necessarily make up what you lost. It does not mean that it cannot be done, but it is going to have its fair share of challenges. I would love to sit here and tell you that I have figured out how to solve all of those challenges; I have not. The system has made a commitment to try to figure that out. I think it makes good sense to keep an eye toward implementation as you look at these things, and both of these bills will serve the same purpose of making sure that 12 credit students get served. The question is, Are we going to sacrifice a great deal in terms of administration and ultimately not knowing the impact on return on investment in the S.B. 146 version because we will have some students who will commit to 12/12/6 and not meet their commitment? Here, because you award on a semester-by-semester basis, I know when you enroll, you hit your 12 credits, but when you say you are going to do 30 credits for the year, I have to get to the end of the year before I know if you hit your commitment and I have already given you the funding. From that standpoint—again, I do not want to leave you with the impression that it cannot be done—I am just still trying to figure it out. A.B. 155 is much easier to administer.

Assemblyman Flores:

This is more of a technical question, in general, on how the program works now. Right now, if I am taking 15 credits including a remedial math and a remedial English, am I eligible for this program?

Crystal Abba:

If you are in a traditional remedial course, no, because the legislation requires that you be college-ready. If you are in a corequisite course in which you are in a gateway course that is coupled simultaneously with remedial support—in other words you are killing two birds with one stone—you are eligible.

Assemblyman Flores:

Understood. The way you determine that now is whether or not the student has tested into all of the 101s, correct?

Crystal Abba:

Or if you have taken an advanced placement course when you were in high school. We have an equation engine that is very complicated, but basically that equation engine looks at whether or not the student was placed, where they were placed, and if they have already completed their gateway course. There are a number of machinations that the equation engine goes through to identify the eligibility of those students based on the college-ready criteria.

Assemblyman Flores:

As a general comment, I want to remind my colleagues that we are a policy committee at the end of the day. We are here to discuss policy. I appreciate your addressing the issue that there will be a fiscal impact, but that will be for a different committee to determine. It is our obligation here to focus on the policy and whether or not we like that.

Chairman Thompson:

Because we have the Promise Scholarship, the Millennium Scholarship, and we have the Silver State Opportunity Grant, so we can maximize student participation, how do we monitor and/or direct students to which program or combination of programs is best for them?

Crystal Abba:

That is an incredibly insightful and excellent question. I will do my best. The challenge is that each of these programs is at a different stage in development. Everybody in the room knows about the Millennium Scholarship. If I am standing in line at the grocery store and I hear a parent talking about college, at some point they mention the Millennium Scholarship. They do not mention SSOG. We are not there yet. We are only in the fourth year of that program. The Promise program has a different enticement to it. It is saying you are going to college for free. The question there is that we still have yet to determine from a national dialogue from experiences in other states and from experiences in Nevada if that truly attracts those low-income students here. The low-income students would have their fees covered by the Pell Grant and would not receive the Promise. However, knowing that it is free because it is covered by other sources may have an enticement that is very valuable for those students. We have not figured that out yet.

Going directly to the Silver State Opportunity Grant, it is trying to take an eye to all of these other programs, but keeping in mind what is that critical mass of dollars that students need to qualify. You are asking the broader question, How do we coordinate all of these together? For Promise, because it is the last-dollar program, it is subtracting out anything you receive from the other two programs. It is leveraging it from that standpoint, and the benefit of Promise is that it actually helped SSOG in Year Four because we had more FAFSA filers. We had more students filling out the FAFSA because they thought they were going to get

Promise, well they actually ended up getting SSOG, so then they did not become a Promise recipient. I am not giving you a really concise answer here other than the fact that because these are all at different stages, we are still weaving that together. I think that every program is unique and every program serves its own purpose. This particular program is laser-focused on low-income students. I do have data in the Year Three report that includes the income level ([Exhibit D](#)) so you feel confident. If you look at the income range for those students who received a SSOG in Year Three for independent students, the median family income was \$16,700. Think what it must be like to live on \$16,700 and to go to school full-time—very challenging. For those students who were dependent, it was \$34,000. They have a parent and possibly siblings—again, very challenging circumstances.

To your question, Chairman Thompson—each program is unique in the population that it is targeting and in its purpose. There may come a time the state has to take a deeper dive and figure out ways to weave all of these together. Do we recreate everything, or do we let each one focus individually on the populations that it is focusing on? We have not gotten there yet.

Assemblyman Flores:

Could you share some perspective or insight as to my previous question? Let us say this bill passed and we did have the requirement for the 12 credits, but we allowed for people to take remedial courses that are not counted toward that total. If a student is taking all 12 credits—of all of their 101s and 102s and 103s—and on top of that a remedial course, can you give some perspective as to the harm you see in that, or how you see think this could be impacted in a negative way?

Crystal Abba:

I think what you are saying is that we would have non-college-ready students eligible for the program and questioning the impact that would have. We would not actually fund that portion of it. From an administrative standpoint, you cannot do it that way because of the way this has been designed. That is because it is not an award that is based on a per-credit amount. I cannot just splice out \$95 per credit for a remedial course because I am doing a calculation based on the total cost of attendance. From an administrative standpoint it is not possible. From a return on investment standpoint, you will erode your return on investment because one of the greatest incentives of this program is the fact that you are incentivizing students to get ready for college. One of the things that is changing and will likely change within the next year as the Board of Regents has adopted strategic goals, is a corequisite. Right now, students who are in a corequisite course are also in the gateway course. They are in the college-level Math 120, and they are getting the remedial support that they need—again, killing two birds with one stone. We are considering those students college-ready because they are enrolled in the college-ready course. That is, ideally, how you get to the population that you want to get to. You give them the remedial support, but also want them enrolled in the gateway course. If you look at the national data on that, those students are much more likely to graduate.

Assemblywoman Torres:

Before we close, I want to get a little more information about the gateway program. Even when I was in school, we did not have those programs. What does a gateway program look like?

Crystal Abba:

When we use the term "gateway course" we mean a 100-level, college-level course. Typically we are referring to math and English. If you are on a liberal arts pathway, it is Math 120. If you are on a science, technology, engineering, or math pathway it is Math 126 and English 101 and 102. Those are critical courses in terms of the data. If you look at the data for students who do not enroll and do not complete a math class in their first year of enrollment, we have data from community colleges for which the graduation rate after not enrolling in a math course in the first two years is about 1.3 percent. Nobody graduates if you do not take that gateway course in the first year. The dialogue around that—not only in Nevada but nationally—is we have to figure out ways to help students pick the right classes and get those out of the way first. One of the most critical ones to get out of the way is math because nobody likes math. We have to get math done especially if you are on a pathway toward graduating.

Assemblywoman Miller:

My question is in the same spirit as my colleague. I understand this is a separate program, I am just trying to get the rationale behind it. Does the Pell Grant support remedial classes?

Crystal Abba:

That is a good question, and it is a repeat from our budget hearing. If you are a degree-seeking student and you are in at least a high school level course—for example Math 95 and Math 96 which are remedial—that is covered. What are not covered by the Pell Grant are those courses below the high school level. If someone places in Math 91 or Math 84, those are not covered. To that extent, the federal government has made a policy decision—they are saying yes, and they are saying no.

Assemblywoman Miller:

They are saying yes to remedial?

Crystal Abba:

They are saying yes to remedial as long as it is at least at the high school level. If it is below the high school level, it is not covered by the Pell Grant.

Assemblywoman Hansen:

I am supportive to the concept of going to 12 credits. There is some justification for understanding that the makeup of these might not necessarily be what we consider a traditional college student. I have a real issue with the idea of remediation. Why do we have this issue anyway? We think we graduate from high school, we are going to college, and we are going to be ready for college-level courses. I understand that the program does not offer remediation, and I agree with that part of this program. This is really for a bigger discussion.

I think that is why you have to come here. I remember sitting through an education hearing in 2013 and heard then-Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education, Daniel Klaich, say that 40 percent of students who graduate K-12 in Nevada are needing remediation. To me that was astounding. I believe we may have even gone up from what I heard in another education meeting on the Senate side this session. We are giving the higher education people a very difficult challenge when we are graduating kids who are not completely ready. I am not pointing fingers, but I am wondering what we are doing in the high school portion to get these kids up to speed, so that we do not lose time with graduating from college because they need remediation or they are so frustrated that they do not graduate from college through no fault of their own. It may be that some of our curriculum did not get them where they needed to be. I do not know whether there is a question in there, as much as I am looking for insight from you.

Crystal Abba:

You are expressing a frustration of every citizen of the state of Nevada. The state has taken a number of steps to improve that, the most recent being the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). My son was in kindergarten when the CCSS were adopted, so he will have the benefit of the CCSS for his entire K-12 experience before he goes on to college. I am hoping he does not place into remediation. The problem with that is the fact that there are some students who say they were in their freshman year of high school when the CCSS were adopted. What that means is that they did not get the benefit of those increased standards for their entire K-12 career. It is hard to tell in the data for a number of years the improvements of that.

There are other partnerships going on too. The Board of Regents just entered into a memorandum of understanding with Clark County School District to address these types of issues. You are hitting on an issue that absolutely has to be solved. It is hard to figure out how to solve it in the data based on the changes in the state standards, but I think we are moving in that direction as we explore things like the corequisite remediation that means that we are going to put students into college-level courses, but we are simultaneously going to provide that support instead of making that support a prerequisite by which you cannot get to the college-level course until you complete that. What it means is that you start behind the starting line. That is the fundamental issue we have been trying to address recently.

Assemblywoman Hansen:

I appreciate your insight. That is why I wanted to bring it up although it is a bigger issue. It gives me comfort to know that with your experience and knowledge the trajectory is hopefully upward and that we are going to capture those students eventually who will be ready for college.

Assemblywoman Hardy:

I want to go back to talk about graduation. I know there has been a push to get college students to graduate in four years, and that was the thinking behind the 15 credits. Do you have an estimate on how this change would impact that?

Crystal Abba:

That is my favorite question. For the students who received the SSOG in Year One, the overall percentage of students who have graduated is 59.4 percent. The national graduation rate for community colleges is usually around 23 percent to 24 percent, and sometimes as high as 25 percent. For one institution, Great Basin College, the graduation rate for the first year cohort was 86.8 percent. Congratulations, you should pat yourselves on the back because this program is doing exactly what you wanted it to do. You are getting the kind of return on investment you wanted. That graduation rate is considerably higher than the rate for universities nationally as well. If you look at Western Nevada College, 75 percent; Truckee Meadows Community College 60.8 percent; Nevada State College, 65.2 percent; College of Southern Nevada (CSN), 52.6 percent. We know that right now CSN is struggling with single-digit graduation rates for their overall population. It is making a difference and improving time to degree.

Assemblywoman Hardy:

Do you think that will change with the reduction in credit requirements?

Crystal Abba:

I do. The challenge is that if you look at the original data that this was based on—where we basically said for those students who take at least 15 credits in their first term—their graduation rate, on average, was around 32 percent. It fluctuates between cohorts, but it is right around that 33 percent range. For students who took between 12 credits and 14 credits, it is about half that—15 percent to 16 percent. My SSOG rate dwarfs that 32 percent. The question is, What is the sweet spot there? Is it because of the money or is it because of the 15 credits? I think it is a combination of the two. There is no way in the data that I will ever be able to splice the two out. You are getting to the heart of the issue of return on investment. If you reduce this program to 12 credits, I do not expect that you will have these same yields, but it is very likely that you will increase the yields of those students who are at 12 credits. The question for the state is, Given the resources that you have, what kind of return on investment do you want?

Chairman Thompson:

If there is anyone in support of Assembly Bill 155 please come forth.

Andrew Sierra, President, Associated Students of the College of Southern Nevada:

I am here in support of Assembly Bill 155, which would lower the credit threshold from 15 credits per semester to 12 credits per semester. As an 18-year-old college freshman and as a first-generation student from a low-income family, I have enough difficulties as it is, juggling the different jobs, my academics, as well as any extracurricular activities. While I might have received some form of financial aid from FAFSA and the institution, it is not enough to cover some basic necessities. Not to mention the fact that I had that money saved up for times of emergencies—because God forbid my family or I go through an emergency which could easily derail my educational pathway.

The average age of students at the College of Southern Nevada is 27 years old, which already lets you know that they have other responsibilities to attend to. The majority of those students are also part-time, which is why I believe that A.B. 155, by lowering the credit threshold, would allow more students to focus on fulfilling those full-time credits as Assemblywoman Torres has mentioned.

I know there is another bill being proposed that would lower the credits to 12 per semester, but would require a student to enroll with at least 6 credits over the summer. The reason I am not supporting that specific bill is due to the fact that the classes offered during the summer are not necessarily the ones that are needed to graduate. They also tend to be more expensive since the state does not give support for them. They are more rigorous since they are four-week courses, and they do not include remedial courses overall.

On behalf of the 35,000 students of the College of Southern Nevada, I urge all of the Committee members to vote in favor of this bill, which would vastly change the lives of many all over Nevada.

Manuel Ayala, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:

I am a constituent, a first-generation student, and a working-class citizen. I am speaking in support of Assembly Bill 155. I am a college student currently taking 13 credits. My schooling is funded through FAFSA and the Millennium Scholarship. Though I am taking 13 credits, I am still working three different jobs and sacrificing my health in order to attend and excel in school. I can only imagine what it would be like for students taking 15 credits and having to work full- and part-time jobs. What we need to do is reduce the requirement of 15 credits to 12 so that more students are eligible for the grant and more people have access to postsecondary education, and more people are able to work and go to school without sacrificing either their health, their family, or their academics. We need to make sure that students have better access to postsecondary education and that starts with allowing more people access to financial aid. I urge you to move ahead with A.B. 155 and reduce the requirements needed.

Jacob Narvaez, Senator, Associated Students of the College of Southern Nevada:

I am standing before you today in order to speak in support of Assembly Bill 155, which would lower the threshold for the Silver State Opportunity Grant (SSOG) from 15 credits to 12 credits per semester. I am speaking as someone who has received the SSOG throughout my tenure at CSN. I am a nontraditional student who received it and I know firsthand just how hard it can be to balance work, life, and 15 credits in a semester.

When you examine A.B. 155, it is important to remember the demographics that make up our state's institutions of higher education as well as those who are the target demographic for the SSOG. Nevada has a large share—especially CSN— of nontraditional students, and the average age is 27 years old. Additionally, the SSOG is given to the low-income students to provide them with additional funding in order for them to focus on their education.

I am a nontraditional low-income student with an EFC of zero. I am 25 years old and originally dropped out of high school and received my GED. Receiving the grant allowed me to focus on my education a lot more than I would have. I was able to cut my hours at work and focus on getting fantastic grades in all of my classes.

One benefit that I had that a lot of other nontraditional students do not have is that I do not have a family of my own. Many students have families and jobs, as well as classes, and for those people, I cannot imagine what it is like for them to have to take 15 or more credits in a semester.

I understand the importance of attending full time, which is why I believe that 12 credits is perfectly reasonable. Attending full time leads to higher graduation rates, it tends to increase an individual's self-esteem if they achieve what they want, and it provides NSHE and the state with the statistics that they want to see.

The sweet spot between not enough focus on school and too much focus on school seems to be 12 credits. It will allow flexibility for students and for those in harder classes, like science, technology, engineering, and math majors, I cannot imagine having to take 15 credits of solely science and mathematics courses. That would be a lot of study hours.

The 12-credit requirement would allow more flexibility when serious situations occur in their home life. I was evicted from my apartment in September while I was taking a 17-hour-course load throughout the fall semester. I was really stressed out during this time period; I was not able to drop one of my classes because if I would have, I would have had to pay CSN the SSOG that I received for that semester. Having it at 12 credits would give some leeway for people in emergency situations.

Additionally, another provision of the bill would allow people in their last semester to still receive the grant even if they do not have to be enrolled in the required credits. That is currently something that I had to face this semester as I will be graduating from CSN in May, and I only had to take 13 credits this semester in order to graduate. As such, I was not eligible to receive the grant, but I was lucky enough to receive a scholarship from the school to make up for that money.

This bill could potentially give thousands of individuals a leg up and could encourage more students to go full time. I encourage you to support Assembly Bill 155.

J. Kyle Dalpe, Interim Executive Director of Legislative Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education:

We support this bill. I would also like to speak for the four institutions that may not have someone here today—the College of Southern Nevada, Great Basin College, Western Nevada College, and Truckee Meadows Community College—all of which have students in those schools who benefit from this program. They are all in support of it as well, and you

will hear from Nevada State College next. Once again, thank you for hearing this bill today, and we look forward to working with you on the next steps which involves the money committees and pushing it through.

**Anthony Ruiz, Senior Advisor for Government Relations and Community Affairs,
Nevada State College:**

I am representing Nevada State College and its nearly 5,000 students. We support Assembly Bill 155. Nevada State College serves an incredibly diverse student body, which consists of both nontraditional and low-income students, the two groups that this scholarship was designed to help. In fact, 43 percent of our students are over the age of 24 years, and 72 percent receive some form of financial aid. Because of this reality, as expressed by the students, they naturally have many other commitments. Accordingly, many of our students find it difficult to take the required 15 credits in a given semester, and the data shows that.

Our most recent data show that 85 percent of our degree-seeking students took less than 15 credits in a semester. This is contrasted with only 53 percent of students who took less than 12 credits in a semester. We know that the students who have received the Silver State Opportunity Grant continue to perform better. In the fall of 2018, students had a grade point average of 3.2 versus 3.0 for the students who did not receive it. We know that they stay enrolled more, but for the fall of 2018 cohort, the students who received the SSOG had a 98 percent retention rate from fall to spring. That is compared with 86 percent—still a really large increase in the numbers. They are more successful. Going back to fall of 2015, the most recent cohort data, student four-year graduation rate was 72 percent, which is a tremendous number for any institution, and certainly for ours.

Much of this has been said already; this matches our students where they are. Coming from a family who had one of those very low EFC numbers, there is nothing more expensive than being poor. Unfortunately for a lot of our students, part of that cost is delaying their education. I ask that you support this bill and the changes to this bill.

Chris Daly, Deputy Executive Director, Government Relations, Nevada State Education Association:

The Nevada State Education Association (NSEA) also supports Assembly Bill 155 revising the eligibility requirements for the Silver State Opportunity Grant. The NSEA members care about students, teaching them in our K-12 schools, and we also care about their opportunities to further their education through institutions of higher education and beyond.

We understand that many students come from low-income households and require support to enter into institutions of higher education. That is why NSEA supports Silver State Opportunity Grants and the proposed revisions to eligibility offered in A.B. 155 ([Exhibit G](#)).

Students from low-income households face a variety of challenges in their day-to-day lives—in the classroom, at home, at work, and financially, as we have heard. Having a more manageable course load would allow many students who have significant other

responsibilities to continue their pursuit of higher education. Given that students from low-income households in Nevada are disproportionately from communities of color, this is both an economic, racial, and social equity issue.

Ruben R. Murillo, Jr., President, Nevada State Education Association, wanted to be here, but unfortunately got stranded due to high winds. He wanted me to relay these words on his behalf.

Growing up in Kansas, my father worked three jobs and my mother cleaned houses to support our family. Their goal was to send us to college, but finances were tight, thus I was the only one of my siblings to attend college. With the aid of small scholarships from community organizations such as the GI Farm fundraisers, financial sacrifices, Pell Grants, and eventually working summers at the Nevada test site, I was able to attend and graduate college. I see myself in every child from a low-income household with visions of attending a university but who cannot afford it. A funding source such as the Silver State Opportunity Grants, Kenny C. Guinn Millennium Scholarships, and others allow these children's dreams to become reality. Please support the amendments in Assembly Bill 155 and make children's dreams of attending higher education a reality.

Jim Sullivan, representing Culinary Workers Union Local 226:

I want to echo everything my brother from the Nevada State Education Association just said. This bill would also help the Culinary Workers Union and our 60,000 members and we stand in support.

John J. Piro, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:

I was a nontraditional student—sometimes taking 9 credits, sometimes taking 12 credits while working full time. I am the first in my family to graduate from college. An opportunity like this that helps students along the way, recognizing that they are working, and they are doing other things while going to school, but still giving them the opportunity to receive these funds, is instrumental in helping them successfully complete college.

I have two coworkers who work in my office. One is a legal secretary. She worked her way up to legal secretary, but she still has bigger plans and she is trying to take college courses. Another coworker works in the information technology office and they both gave their permission to tell their stories.

They are both working parents and trying to go to school. Because the credit limits were a little high for this grant, they had to take a pause. Lowering that would help them get back on track with graduating on time and fulfilling their dreams of moving up in our office or to other places.

I definitely support this bill and urge your support of this bill as well.

Maria Nieto, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:

I am the civic engagement organizer for Mi Familia Vota. We work very closely with the Latina community here, especially on the east side of Las Vegas where a lot of low-income families live. I am here to support A.B. 155 because a lot of low-income families do have nontraditional ways for school. Also, it allows students to focus more on the difficult classes and handle the demands of more studying, as Assemblywoman Torres said. You have to study almost 30 to 40 hours on top of having a full-time job.

I am an undocumented student and I have two younger sisters following me, and that is also why I support A.B. 155. My parents are not only thinking how they are going to support me through graduate school, but also support my sisters through community college. My sisters are citizens, so they will be able to receive FAFSA, but at the same time, that is not enough. Knowing that we are only four years apart, that is not enough time to save money for all of us. Also, low-income community families rely on summer income as well as working two jobs just to pay for spring and fall semesters. That experience is declining grades, especially having to work a full-time job just to maintain your 15 credits to receive this grant. It is very important to be able to lower it to 12 credits instead of 15 credits, so they can even handle a full-time job on top of that.

Low-income communities only go to certificate programs, not being able to support themselves to graduate school, university, or four-year colleges. They are less likely to rely on financial safety net such as checking and savings accounts, especially if their parents are undocumented because they are afraid that the information they would give to the banks will be used against them when they are just asking for help. Thank you and please support Assembly Bill 155.

Ericka Castro, Organizing Manager, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada:

I am the organizing manager with the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN), and also a legislative cochair for the Nevada Immigrant Coalition. I am here on behalf of both PLAN and the Nevada Immigrant Coalition to show support for Assembly Bill 155. I echo much of what the students here and others in Carson City have said.

As mentioned earlier, this measure is really important because low-income working students tend to be predominately black, brown, and Latino women and first-time college students. For most of us, it is really hard for us to have any kind of financial stability when some of us have to make sure that we are taking care of our families and that we are providing for our children, and also making sure we are meeting our ends.

We have also discussed a proposed amendment with Assemblywoman Torres to provide more flexibility to NSHE by developing their own financial aid form and not being tied to the FASFA to be able to meet other student's needs in our state. Again, we are here to support A.B. 155.

Chairman Thompson:

Thank you and please continue to work with Assemblywoman Torres on that proposed amendment.

Scott A. Sabraw, representing Clark County Educational Association:

We want to echo everything else that has been said as well. We are in full support of this bill. On a personal note, I, too, was a nontraditional student. This would have gone a long way to let me finish a little quicker than I did and I think it is a good thing and good work out for a good pace for people who need to work a little harder to get through and unfortunately do not have parent or other supports. We urge you to vote yes on this bill when it comes up.

Kent M. Ervin, Legislative Liaison, Nevada Faculty Alliance:

I represent the faculty at all eight NSHE institutions. We support Assembly Bill 155. Thank you very much for presenting it, Assemblywoman Torres. Forty-plus years ago, as a traditional student, I could go to my own state's public university just by living in a co-op house and having summer jobs—I was able to do that without incurring debt. It has changed over the years. State funding, nationwide and in Nevada, has declined, whereas the portion that comes from the students has increased. That is why it is so important that we do something for the cash-poor students who otherwise could not attend our public universities.

This is not a free ride. Students are expected to work to meet their portion. That is why it is a little problematic to do the 12 plus 12 plus 6 as a requirement. We also supported Senate Bill 146, but we fully support this bill for that reason.

We hear from students whose primary identity, no matter their ethnicity, is cash-poor. They are on the edge. If they start out with 15 credits and drop back to 12 credits for whatever reason—life happens, academics sometimes happens—they are still eligible for their federal grants, but they lose this funding, then they drop off. That is a permanent drop off. We support the 12 credits. The expected fiscal note will certainly show the need.

I do want to say that helping students complete in two or four years is really important. I teach chemistry. It is the gateway course for nursing, but before they can take the chemistry course, they need to have the math readiness at the level for chemistry and that means that if you are in the corequisite course, the first semester you are delayed to the second semester. If you can take the chemistry course, or whatever field in the summer, that prevents you from having the cascading effect of not being able to continue with your program. If NSHE can figure out some incentives within this program for students who can do the 15 credits, plus 15 credits, or if they drop back, and get the 3 or the 6 in the summer, that would be wonderful.

Chairman Thompson:

We will open for opposition for Assembly Bill 155. [There was none.] We will move to neutral for Assembly Bill 155. [There was none.] [([Exhibit H](#)), ([Exhibit I](#)), ([Exhibit J](#)), and ([Exhibit K](#))] were presented but not discussed and will become part of the record.]

Assemblywoman Torres:

Today we had the pleasure to hear from our Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs. The Silver State Opportunity Grant is meeting its goal. We are graduating kids. We can pat ourselves on the back now, but we need to make sure that we are graduating more kids in the years to come. I really do think this is an opportunity for us to do that.

We also had the pleasure of hearing from many students past and present who recognized the hardship of completing 15 credits. This session, with this bill, we have the unique opportunity to meet the needs of thousands of students in the state of Nevada. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any additional questions.

Chairman Thompson:

We will close this hearing on Assembly Bill 155 and open for public comment. [There was no one.]

The meeting is adjourned [at 3:24 p.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Sharon McCallen
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson, Chairman

DATE: _____

EXHIBITS

[Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda.

[Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster.

[Exhibit C](#) is a copy of a PowerPoint presentation with videos titled "Career Choice: A Peculiar Approach to Talent Development," presented by Tammy Thieman, Senior Manager, Amazon Career Choice.

[Exhibit D](#) is a document titled "The Silver State Opportunity Grant: Year Three Results for Nevada's First State-Supported, Need-Based Financial Aid Program," dated February 2019, presented by Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education.

[Exhibit E](#) is a proposed amendment to [Assembly Bill 155](#), submitted by Assemblywoman Selena Torres, Assembly District No. 3.

[Exhibit F](#) is a copy of a PowerPoint presentation titled "The Silver State Opportunity Grant: Who is Eligible and How the Program Works Currently," dated February 22, 2019, presented by Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education.

[Exhibit G](#) is a letter dated, February 26, 2019, to Chairman Tyrone Thompson and members of the Assembly Committee on Education, authored and presented by Chris Daly, Deputy Executive Director of Government Relations, Nevada State Education Association, in support of [Assembly Bill 155](#).

[Exhibit H](#) is a proposed amendment to [Assembly Bill 155](#), prepared by the Nevada System of Higher Education, submitted by Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education.

[Exhibit I](#) is enrollment statistics for select institutions within the Nevada System of Higher Education, submitted by Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Nevada System of Higher Education.

[Exhibit J](#) is a letter dated February 26, 2019, to Chairman Thompson and Members of the Assembly Committee on Education, authored by Erika Castro, Organizing Manager, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, in support of [Assembly Bill 155](#).

[Exhibit K](#) is a letter dated February 25, 2019, to Chairman Thompson and Members of the Assembly Committee on Education, authored by Sylvia Lazos, representing Nevada Immigration Coalition, in support of [Assembly Bill 155](#).