



DOAA

Georgia Department
of Audits & Accounts

Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

January 10, 2025

Honorable Eric Bell
State Representative
411-D Coverdell Legislative Office Building
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

SUBJECT: Fiscal Note
House Bill (LC 61 0012)

Dear Representative Bell,

The bill would repeal the Drug-Free Postsecondary Education Act of 1990 that makes students convicted of certain drug offenses ineligible for loans, scholarships, and grants. The bill provides that students shall not be deemed ineligible for HOPE scholarships or grants based solely on certain convictions, specifically an offense involving marijuana or a controlled substance.

HOPE Scholarships and Grants are available to qualifying students who attend the University System of Georgia (USG), the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), and HOPE-eligible private postsecondary institutions. USG said that institutions already have established rules and regulations consistent with local, state and federal law concerning drug use, manufacture, distribution, sale, and possession on campus. They do not believe that the bill would change institutions' policies on students faced with drug convictions. TCSG also said that their campuses have rules and regulations regarding drugs on campus and do not anticipate the bill changing the policies.

While we are unable to provide an exact estimate of how many students would receive HOPE as a result of the bill, it would likely be a relatively small number. The Georgia Student Finance Commission does not have data on the number of potentially impacted students. TCSG and USG also do not track the number of students denied the HOPE Grant or HOPE Scholarship on this basis. USG did report that they believe there to have been minimal instances of students being denied, citing an example of one institution with two instances of HOPE denial due to a self-reported drug conviction in 25 years. The number of students who did not apply for HOPE because they knew they were ineligible is unknown.

Table 1 provides the annual cost of HOPE for a small number of students. Our estimate that only a small number of students would be impacted is based on the USG statement and information related to drug convictions of juveniles discussed below. The amount per student is based on average award amounts across all USG institutions.

Table 1: Yearly Hope Scholarship Cost Impact

Number of Students	Yearly Cost
5	\$24,908
10	\$49,816
15	\$74,724

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2023 there were about 1.5 million Georgians between the ages of 10-19.
- The Georgia Bureau of Investigation’s 2023 Crime Statistics Summary reported that 576 juveniles were arrested for possession of marijuana in 2023 and five were arrested for sale of marijuana. This represents roughly 0.04% of the juvenile population. Another 221 juvenile arrests for possession of other substances, and 103 arrests for sales of other substances. These represent approximately 0.02% of the population.
- Individuals with a conviction would no longer be ineligible under this bill, but they would still need to meet other HOPE requirements for the funding.

Respectfully,



Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor



Richard Dunn, Director
Office of Planning and Budget

GSG/RD/esw