

1 WHEREAS, relative to the purpose of the Louisiana GO Grant program, the
2 legislature finds in R.S. 17:3046 that leveraging access to postsecondary education for
3 students with demonstrated financial need ensures that all qualified students are afforded an
4 opportunity to achieve their full educational potential, increase their overall quality of life,
5 and maximize their contribution to the state's economic development; and

6 WHEREAS, though TOPS and the GO Grant program are excellent programs that
7 have helped thousands of Louisiana students in their pursuit of postsecondary education,
8 there are some aspects of the overall financial aid landscape in Louisiana that merit further
9 analysis and consideration; and

10 WHEREAS, one issue that many find concerning about TOPS is that TOPS awards
11 are disproportionately awarded to white, relatively wealthy students, as noted in the *TOPS*
12 *Report: Analysis of the TOPS Program from 2003-2014*, published by the Board of Regents,
13 which states that during this time span, approximately seventy-nine percent of TOPS
14 recipients were white, and the mean and median household income of TOPS recipients
15 ranged from \$70,000 to \$99,000, much higher than Louisiana's median household income
16 of approximately \$44,000; and

17 WHEREAS, another concern that some have raised about TOPS is the award
18 retention rate of its recipients; this same Board of Regents report states that approximately
19 one-third of TOPS recipients between 2003 and 2014 had their award cancelled during some
20 point in their postsecondary academic career; and

21 WHEREAS, one of the most widely discussed matters related to TOPS is its cost;
22 according to the report, the state spent approximately \$1.9 billion funding the TOPS program
23 from 1999 through 2014, and during that time period, total expenditures on the program
24 increased 296%; and

25 WHEREAS, in terms of elements of the Go Grant program that call for continued
26 study, its underfunding ranks above all; in 2011, the Louisiana Budget Project (LBP)
27 published a report stating that in Louisiana, "spending on need-based aid is consistently out
28 of line with that of other states" and that the GO Grant Program "has been chronically
29 underfunded"; and

1 WHEREAS, this LBP report also points out that "even with a maximum allowable
2 GO Grant, students can have large, unmet financial needs" and that "compared to other
3 Southern states and to states nationally, Louisiana spends a disproportionately large share
4 of its financial aid resources on those who can readily afford college while providing too
5 little to those who need financial help in order to have a chance at a college education"; and

6 WHEREAS, calling for more need-based aid, the LBP report states that "students
7 from low-income and minority backgrounds – those who have been traditionally
8 underrepresented in Louisiana's colleges and universities – are less likely to benefit from
9 TOPS" and "to ensure that higher education remains accessible to all Louisianans, Louisiana
10 needs to redirect its financial aid resources and to increase funding to its need-based
11 financial aid program"; and

12 WHEREAS, this report's ultimate recommendation is that "legislators should strike
13 a balance between funding TOPS and Go Grants so that taxpayer dollars maximize
14 attendance across all income levels"; and

15 WHEREAS, in light of the state's precarious budget situation and the fundamental
16 importance of postsecondary education, it is imperative that the positive and negative aspects
17 of the state's merit-based and need-based student financial aid programs receive a thorough
18 study.

19 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Representatives of the
20 Legislature of Louisiana does hereby urge and request the Board of Regents, in collaboration
21 with the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission, to study the state's merit-
22 based and need-based student financial assistance programs and to submit a written report
23 of findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the House Committee on Education not
24 later than sixty days prior to the beginning of the 2016 Regular Session of the Legislature
25 of Louisiana.

26 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that such report shall analyze the strengths and
27 weaknesses of both merit-based and need-based programs in the state and provide
28 recommendations for how such programs might be revised in terms of helping more
29 Louisiana students maximize their postsecondary education opportunities and success.

1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a suitable copy of this Resolution be transmitted
2 to the chairman of the Board of Regents, the commissioner of higher education, and the
3 chairman of the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission.

DIGEST

The digest printed below was prepared by House Legislative Services. It constitutes no part of the legislative instrument. The keyword, one-liner, abstract, and digest do not constitute part of the law or proof or indicia of legislative intent. [R.S. 1:13(B) and 24:177(E)]

HR 178 Original

2015 Regular Session

Jefferson

Requests that the Bd. of Regents, in collaboration with the La. Student Financial Assistance Commission, study the state's merit-based and need-based student financial assistance programs and submit a written report of findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the House Committee on Education not later than 60 days prior to the beginning of the 2016 R.S. Provides that such report analyze the strengths and weaknesses of both merit-based and need-based programs and provide recommendations for how such programs might be revised in terms of helping more La. students maximize their postsecondary education opportunities and success.