ASSEMBLY, No. 5516

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

222nd LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED SEPTEMBER 17, 2026

Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman DAWN FANTASIA
District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes pilot program providing tuition fee waiver for certain apprenticeship courses.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

AN ACT concerning apprenticeship tuition fees and supplementing chapter 62 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. As used in this act:

"Eligible person" means an individual who has not previously completed a pre-apprenticeship program and whose gross aggregate household income at the time of admission to a New Jersey public institution of higher education or county vocational school providing post-secondary vocational education does not exceed 400 percent of the federal poverty level.

"Gross aggregate household income" means the total annual income of all members of a household, from whatever source derived, including, but not limited to, pension, annuity, retirement and Social Security benefits received during the taxable year.

"Registered apprenticeship" means an apprenticeship in a program providing to each trainee combined classroom and on-the-job training under the direct and close supervision of a highly skilled worker in an occupation recognized as an apprenticeable trade, and registered by the Office of Apprenticeship of the United States Department of Labor and meeting the standards established by that office.

"State household median income" means the point that divides the gross aggregate household income distribution into halves, one-half with income above the median and the other with income below the median as determined by the United States Census Bureau American Community Survey. The median is based on the income distribution of all households, including those with no income in the State.

"Tuition" means the charges imposed by a New Jersey public institution of higher education or county vocational school providing post-secondary vocational education for enrollment at the institution or school.

2. a. There is established a two-year tuition-free apprenticeship pilot program under which an eligible person shall be permitted to attend, tuition-free, courses available at any public institution of higher education or county vocational school which are qualified to serve as the classroom training or education component of a registered apprenticeship program in which the person is participating as a registered apprentice if:

(1) tuition costs are not covered by an employer through employment benefits;

(2) the person completes a New Jersey Alternative Financial Aid Application or a Free Application for Federal Student Aid each year

within the established deadlines and has exhausted all financial aid assistance;

(3) the person retains employment as an active registered apprentice under the registered apprenticeship program and maintains satisfactory academic progress to qualify for renewal of the tuition waiver; and

(4) the person completes each course eligible for a tuition waiver under this section with a passing grade.

b. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development shall provide funding in an amount not to exceed $500,000 per year to public institutions of higher education or county vocational schools for the tuition cost of eligible persons who enroll in the institution pursuant to the provisions of this section. The department shall use any available funds provided to the State under the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. s.49 et seq.), or from funds that may be available from the $27,500,000 which was appropriated pursuant to the annual appropriations act for State fiscal year 2026 from the Workforce Development Partnership Fund for the purpose of funding the NJ Apprenticeship Network, the Career Accelerator Internship Program, the Workforce Development Policy and Evaluation Lab, the NJ Career Network, and such other priority workforce initiatives recommended by the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development.

c. No later than six months following the conclusion of the pilot program, the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development shall submit a report to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), on the results of the pilot program. The report shall include, but not be limited to, information on the number of individuals served, total program spending, program spending by public institution of higher education and county vocational school, and a recommendation regarding the continuation of the pilot program.

3. This act shall take effect immediately and shall first apply to the first full academic year following the date of enactment.

STATEMENT

This bill establishes a two-year tuition-free apprenticeship pilot program that requires public institutions of higher education to waive the tuition fees of certain courses which are qualified to serve as the classroom training or education component of a registered apprenticeship for eligible persons.

Under the bill, an eligible person is an individual who has not previously completed a pre-apprenticeship program and whose gross aggregate household income at the time of admission to a New Jersey public institution of higher education or county vocational does not

exceed 400 percent of the federal poverty level. The person is to be deemed eligible for a tuition fee waiver if:

1. tuition costs are not covered by the employer through employment benefits;

2. the person completes a New Jersey Alternative Financial Aid Application or a Free Application for Federal Student Aid each year and has exhausted all financial aid assistance;

3. the person retains employment as an active registered apprentice under the registered apprenticeship program and maintains satisfactory academic progress to qualify for renewal of the tuition waiver; and

4. the person completes each course for which a tuition waiver is provided with a passing grade.

The bill requires the Department of Labor and Workforce Development to reimburse public institutions of higher education and county vocational schools for the cost of the tuition waivers.