



## Legislative Testimony SB 227 Silver State Opportunity Grant Program

March 13, 2015

### Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education

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As the Guinn Center noted in our *State of Latinos in the Intermountain West* report, Nevada is the only state in the Intermountain West that does not have a state-sponsored or state-funded need based financial aid program; only a handful of states today do not have a state-sponsored need based financial aid program.

There is significant demand for the Silver State Opportunity Grant program.

- College in Nevada is becoming less affordable for many families.
- In Nevada, college tuition rates were raised 8 percent in 2011. In June 2014, the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents voted to increase tuition four percent annually for the next four years.
- Nevada is ranked last in the nation in terms of college affordability with respect to median family income for students attending two year institutions.
- Nevada ranks lowest among the states in 2-year college participation rates for students from low-income families at only 6.4 percent in 2012. This statistic is not surprising given that the percentage of family income required for a low-income student to attend one year at one of Nevada's community college is 62.4 percent.

Additionally, our research on best practices in strategies to retain and graduate students suggests that state-based financial aid programs can help improve student success and outcomes.

- As we noted in our *State of Latinos in the Intermountain West* report, barely half of the students who start four-year colleges graduate, and only a third of those enrolled in community colleges graduate.
- Numerous studies have documented the factors that are associated with failure to graduate or complete academic programs within a reasonable period. Chief among these are a lack of finances, as well as the lack of basic reading and mathematical skills.
- The Silver State Opportunity Grant program creates incentives that will enable students to attend college full-time and will increase the likelihood that they graduate within a reasonable period of time.
- The Guinn Center supports the 15 credit hours requirement, as well as the requirement that applicants demonstrate proficiency in English and mathematics sufficient for placement into college-level English and math courses. The program, coupled with these requirements, improves the likelihood that the State will realize a positive return on its investment.

The Silver State Opportunity Grant program will help improve student success. Additionally, it will give our community colleges and state college an opportunity to be successful under the new higher education funding formula that emphasizes student outcomes.

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