



Office of the Governor

**MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM**

NEW MEXICO  
HIGHER EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT



Fostering Student Success from Cradle to Career

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Governor plans to deliver free college for New  
Mexicans,  
simplify scholarship programs**  
*State of New Mexico proposes most accessible  
scholarship program in the United States*

SANTA FE – Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Friday announced the introduction of legislation designed to enact a sweeping expansion of the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship, delivering tuition-free higher education to every New Mexican who wishes to pursue higher education.

Sponsored by Sen. Liz Stefanics and Rep. Joy Garratt, Senate Bill 140, the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship Act, would establish the most accessible state-funded scholarship program in the country and provide \$85.5 million toward the Opportunity Scholarship. Up to 35,000 New Mexico students enrolled at a public college or university in the fall of 2022 will attend tuition-free. It would also combine four existing state scholarship funds into a single fund, enabling colleges and universities to award one full scholarship to cover full tuition and fees for eligible students.

“The intellectual infrastructure of a nationally-competitive state economy is being built right now on campuses and in communities across our state – but we can do more,” said **Gov. Lujan Grisham**. “The Opportunity Scholarship breaks down barriers that keep New Mexicans from accessing the higher education and career training they need to provide for their families, power New Mexico’s workforce, and drive the innovations that will make our state a leader now and for years to come. Free college will uplift our state and empower New Mexicans to reach higher and think bigger in 2022 and beyond.”

“New Mexico made history in 1996 by being the first state to tell high school students that they could go to college tuition-free, but there are so many more New Mexicans of all ages and backgrounds who could benefit from higher education but can’t afford it,” said Higher Education Department **Secretary Stephanie Rodriguez**. “We plan to make history again by establishing the most accessible free college program in the United States and making sure that all New Mexicans have the chance to gain the skills our state needs and that lead to family-sustaining careers right here at home.”

SB 140 establishes the program in law to ensure that future New Mexicans can continue to benefit from tuition-free access to higher education. The legislation also simplifies the process for colleges to award scholarships by combining pre-existing funds for the Opportunity, Lottery, College Affordability, and Legislative Endowment scholarship programs into a single non-reverting fund.

The Opportunity Scholarship covers full tuition and fees for New Mexicans of any age pursuing certificate, associate, and bachelor's degrees either part-time or full-time at any New Mexico public or Tribal college or university. To qualify, students must be New Mexico residents and maintain a 2.5 GPA while they are enrolled in college.

Over 18,000 students benefited from the Opportunity and Lottery Scholarships in Fall 2021, but restrictive eligibility requirements and limited funding in prior years have meant that many students have not received support. State higher education institutions reported an unmet need of over 15,500 students during the Fall 2021 Semester.

“The Opportunity Scholarship Act will ensure college affordability by establishing an all-encompassing free college package for New Mexicans looking to enroll at a public college or university in the state. This is a game changer. We will meet current and future students in the middle by allowing them the flexibility they need to complete a postsecondary credential, including credit bearing job-oriented certificate programs,” **Rep. Joy Garratt** said.

“Scholarship programs need to be accessible for students and simple to navigate. The Opportunity Scholarship Act ensures that students can pursue higher education at any age in their home communities and continue to provide for their families without having to worry about the cost of college or qualifying for several different scholarships,” **Sen. Liz Stefanics** said.

New Mexicans can learn more about New Mexico's plan for free college at [www.freecollegenm.org](http://www.freecollegenm.org).

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