

Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program

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Issue

You asked for a description of the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program.

Summary

The Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program provides state-funded scholarships to Connecticut residents who attend in-state public or private higher education institutions (excluding Connecticut State Community College) seeking their first associate or bachelor's degree. It is available to full-time or part-time students (those earning at least six semester credits).

The Office of Higher Education (OHE) administers the program, which consists of three types of awards: need-merit, need-based, and Charter Oak grants (this grant is eliminated as of July 1, 2026). Students can use awards for tuition and the required fees published by institutions participating in the program, plus a fixed amount for required books and educational supplies as determined by OHE ([CGS § 10a-173](#)).

Need-Based Award

OHE allocates funds to institutions for need-based awards based on their actual full-time equivalent enrollment of eligible students at or below 200% of the maximum student aid index (SAI) eligible for a federal Pell grant award in the prior academic year. SAI is the index used to determine eligibility for financial aid as computed from a student's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Institutions report their enrollment data by July 1 each year. By October 1 each year, OHE (1) publishes this data on its website and (2) notifies institutions of, and publishes on its website, the

proportion of annual funds each institution will receive in the next fiscal year (see information on [OHE's website](#)). [PA 25-168](#), § 262, as of July 1, 2025, also requires OHE to notify each institution annually by November 1 of the estimated amount of funds allocated to the institution for these awards in the following fiscal year.

Full-time students receive an award of up to \$4,500. Part-time students receive up to (1) 50% of the maximum award if earning at least six but less than nine credits and (2) 75% of the maximum award if earning at least 9 but less than 12 credits ([CGS § 10a-173\(d\)](#)).

Need and Merit-Based Award

Eligibility for this award is based on (1) using SAI to determine need and (2) high school academic achievement or performance on standardized academic aptitude tests to determine merit. OHE gives awards to students based on a sliding scale up to maximum SAI, and based on the amount of funding available and the number of eligible applicants ([CGS § 10a-173\(c\)](#)).

According to [OHE](#), high school seniors in the top 20% of their high school junior year class and college undergraduates in the top 20% of their high school senior year class or with a combined SAT score of at least 1200 or ACT score of at least 25 can submit a FAFSA to apply.

Students receiving this award cannot also receive a need-based grant. Awards must be a higher amount than need-based grants ([CGS § 10a-173\(c\)](#)). According to [OHE](#), awards are up to \$5,200 for students attending a four-year program and up to \$4,650 for students attending a two-year program.

Charter Oak Grant

OHE allocates funds to Charter Oak State College to provide grants to students in a degree program who have substantial financial need. The maximum award is the amount of tuition and required fees, plus an OHE-determined amount for books and supplies ([CGS § 10a-173\(f\)](#)).

[PA 25-168](#), § 263, eliminates the Charter Oak grant as of July 1, 2026.

Reporting

Institutions must report to OHE each year on eligible students who applied for financial aid. Institutions that do not report cannot take part in the Willis Program the following fiscal year ([CGS § 10a-173\(e\)](#)).

Funding, Distributions, and Administration

Table 1 below displays information provided by the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) on funding for the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program since fiscal year (FY) 2014.

Table 1: Funding for the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program

FY	Total Spent	Total General Fund (including carry forward)	Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding	Total Percent Change from Prior Year
FY 14	\$42,132,439	\$42,132,439	-	-
FY 15	42,023,498	42,023,498	-	(0.3)
FY 16	39,638,381	39,638,381	-	(5.7)
FY 17	37,363,944	37,363,944	-	(5.7)
FY 18	35,345,804	35,345,804	-	(5.4)
FY 19	33,388,637	33,388,637	-	(5.5)
FY 20	33,388,637	33,388,637	-	-
FY 21	33,388,637	33,388,637	-	-
FY 22	37,430,212	33,292,553	\$4,137,659	12.1
FY 23	57,375,038	33,182,424	24,192,614	53.3
FY 24 ¹	41,543,758	8,199,726	33,344,032	(27.6)
FY 25 est. ²	45,397,115	29,072,584	16,324,531	9.3
FY 26 est. ³	41,288,637	41,288,637	-	(9.1)
FY 27 est. ³	41,288,637	41,288,637	-	-

¹ The FY 24 and FY 25 budget transferred \$8.5 million from the Willis Scholarship to debt-free community college.

² This estimate is from Spring 2025. Final FY 25 numbers are not yet available.

³ The FY 26 and FY 27 budget appropriates approximately \$26.3 million in FY 26 and \$41.3 million in FY 27 for the Willis Scholarship. Additionally, it is anticipated that \$15 million in Willis FY 25 carryforward funding will be available in FY 26 and the total FY 26 funding will equal total FY 27 funding (see [CGS § 10a-173\(b\)](#)).

(Source: OFA)

The law requires distributing funds as follows:

1. need and merit-based grants receive the greater of (1) between 20% and 30% of available funds or (2) \$10 million;
2. need-based grants receive up to 80% of available funds;

3. the Charter Oak grant receives at least \$100,000 of available funds; and
4. OHE keeps 0.25% of available funds, but at least \$100,000, annually for administration ([CGS § 10a-173\(b\)](#)).

OHE must use fiscal procedures that ensure accountability, including conducting compliance reviews of institutions receiving funds. Institutions must biennially have independent certified public accountants audit their participation in the program and submit the results to OHE. If OHE determines an institution is not substantially complying with program requirements, (1) the institution cannot receive funds under the program in the following fiscal year and (2) OHE must restore funding when it determines the institution has returned to substantial compliance ([CGS § 10a-173\(g\)](#)).

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