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FL Boosts Need-Based Aid, Minority Enrollment

By Anne O'Dell

Last week, Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed into law a new \$6.5-million increase to financial aid.

Now, students whose parents do not have bachelor's degrees could get help through need-based awards.

Application is open to all students; however, officials hope the new program will help boost minority enrollment and retention.

The First Generation Matching Grant Program was proposed after minority enrollment dropped last year at the 11 public universities in Florida.

The bill, sponsored by Democratic state senator Al Lawson, was signed by Gov. Jeb Bush at the historically black Florida A&M University, where many students supported the legislation.

The amount of each scholarship granted through the new program will not exceed the cost of attendance; in Florida, costs average \$15,000 per year. Awards will be granted based on the cost of attendance minus other aid received.

Some legislators have speculated that the decrease in minority students attending the state's colleges and universities is due to Gov. Bush's prohibition of race-based considerations in school admissions.

Affirmative action-based admissions and financial aid decisions have been under fire lately at the national level. Universities are struggling to improve ethnic and intellectual diversity on campus, but many say these considerations are unfair to otherwise deserving white students.

In Florida, Gov. Bush scrapped affirmative action, opting instead to use his One Florida program. Although the plan allowed for a reserved spot at state school for the top 20 percent of Florida's graduating seniors, many say it did not support minority enrollment.