

**GOVERNOR'S STATEMENT UPON SIGNING
SENATE BILL NO. 960
(First Reprint)**

Today I am pleased to sign Senate Bill No. 960 (First Reprint), which requires the parent of a dependent student who is enrolled in or is planning to enroll in a New Jersey institution of higher education and who seeks to apply for any student financial aid programs offered by the federal or State government, to provide the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority ("HESAA") with a completed financial aid application. Institutions of higher education must notify the Executive Director of HESAA of every student who reports that their parent has refused to provide the information necessary to complete a financial aid application. The Executive Director must then provide written notification to the identified parents that failure to submit a completed financial aid application on behalf of a dependent child will result in the assessment of a civil penalty of up to \$500.

I commend the bill's sponsors for their efforts to assist New Jersey's students in receiving the financial assistance they need to pursue higher education. According to HESAA, last year approximately 4,000 dependent students in New Jersey submitted Free Applications for Federal Student Aid without including the requisite financial information from their parents. Although this represents a relatively small percentage of the number of students who enroll at our colleges and universities, it is still an unacceptably high number. By authorizing HESAA to assess a financial penalty against parents who refuse to provide the information needed to assess their student's eligibility for student aid, this bill should increase parent cooperation, thereby ensuring that more students' financial aid applications are approved.

At the same time, however, the civil penalty must be assessed sparingly, and, as the bill directs, only in those cases where a parent is willfully noncompliant. Penalties should not be levied against parents who unknowingly withheld information, or who inadvertently missed a deadline. In order to protect against these and other unintended outcomes, I am directing HESAA, prior to assessing a penalty, to first provide written warning to parents notifying them of their failure to provide the necessary information and providing them with an opportunity to come into compliance. I am further

directing HESAA to assist these parents and students,
whenever necessary, with completing the financial aid
application.

Date: September 14, 2020

/s/ Philip D. Murphy

Governor

Attest:

/s/ Matthew J. Platkin

Chief Counsel to the Governor