Pledging to Do “Good”: An Early Commitment Pledge Program, College Scholarships, and High School Outcomes in Washington State

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Abstract: Indiana, Oklahoma, and Washington each have programs designed to address college enrollment gaps by offering a promise of state-based college financial aid to low-income middle school students in exchange for making a pledge to do well in high school, be a good citizen, not be convicted of a felony, and apply for financial aid to college. Using a triple-difference specification, we estimate the effects of Washington's College Bound Scholarship program on students’ high school grades, high school graduation, juvenile detention and rehabilitation, and incarceration in state prison during high school or early adulthood. We find insignificant and substantively small or negative effects on these outcomes. These results call into question the rationale for such early commitment programs.