

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1876

As Reported By House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to education grants for members of the Washington national guard.

Brief Description: Providing educational grants for members of the Washington national guard who do not possess a baccalaureate degree.

Sponsors: Representatives Flemming, Carlson, Dyer, Kremen and Rayburn.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Higher Education, February 23, 1993, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 18 members: Representatives Jacobsen, Chair; Quall, Vice Chair; Brumsickle, Ranking Minority Member; Sheahan, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; Bray; Carlson; Casada; Finkbeiner; Flemming; Kessler; J. Kohl; Mielke; Ogden; Orr; Rayburn; Shin; and Wood.

Staff: Marilee Scarbrough (786-7196).

Background: From 1979 to 1985, the National Guard Assistance Program operated in Washington. The program permitted enlisted members of the National Guard to receive grants of up to \$1,000 per year to cover reimbursable educational costs at accredited public or private colleges. The reimbursable costs included tuition, fees, books, institutional services, and laboratory supplies. Recipients were limited to 12 academic quarters or the equivalent. From 1979 to 1985, approximately \$200,000 per biennium was appropriated for the program.

Under the 1983 Sunset Act, the program was scheduled to be terminated on June 30, 1985. The Legislative Budget Committee (LBC) undertook a final program audit. The committee found that 27 states had tuition waivers or assistance for National Guard personnel. Two states provided education loans, eight states had selective scholarship programs, and six states provided educational

assistance for dependents, usually under hardship conditions. Seven states did not have any program.

The final LBC program audit concluded that the effectiveness of the assistance program "cannot be readily demonstrated as required under the provisions of the Sunset Act," and that the continuation of the program was not warranted at that time. The LBC also commented that, "...if the Legislature decides to continue the program, it is additionally recommended that the program be targeted toward enhancing the manning of those National Guard units most likely to be utilized in the event of natural or man made disasters."

Legislation was introduced in 1985 to continue the assistance program. The legislation did not pass, and the program terminated on June 30, 1985.

Some members of the National Guard are eligible to participate in the Montgomery GI Bill Program. Eligibility criteria and educational benefits vary depending on the type and date of enlistment, and on the nature of the educational program. At the present time, members of the Active Guard Reserve are not eligible to participate in the Montgomery GI Bill Program. According to the information provided by the National Guard, about 300 members of the Washington National Guard have no education benefits.

Summary of Bill: An educational grant program is established for Washington National Guard members. Eligible participants are enlisted members and officers at the rank of captain and below. Eligible guardsmen may use the grants to attend an institution of higher education in Washington state.

A participant must agree to serve at least an additional four years after completion of the last class for which the member received a grant. The amount of the grant shall be reduced by the amount of federal assistance.

Payments for the loan are made to the eligible institution of higher education. The adjutant general will inform applicants when appropriations will be adequate for grants. An individual is eligible for a grant for 12 quarters or eight semesters.

A guardsmen that fails to comply must repay all loans plus interest. The adjutant general has authority to bring a civil action to recover on the loan. A national guardsmen is released from liability if nonpayment is due to disability, death, or if the guardsmen enlists in the armed forces for a term not less than the remaining National Guard term.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 18, 1993.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The Washington State National Guard provides a vital service to our state and nation. The Washington guardsmen serve our state in emergencies and serve our nation during war. There are approximately 300 individuals in the Washington National Guard who do not receive educational benefits. This legislation is modeled on similar programs in Ohio, Michigan, Nebraska, and Arkansas. Current National Guard policy requires a guardsman to have a Bachelor of Arts Degree to advance to the level of lieutenant. Those states that have higher education benefits for guardsmen have witnessed a 75 percent increase in the retention rate of their National Guard personnel.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: (In favor): Maureen Flak, National Guard Association of Washington.