

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1601

As Reported By House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to tuition and fee waivers.

Brief Description: Providing tuition and fee waivers for members of the Washington national guard.

Sponsors: Representatives D. Schmidt, Carlson, Mulliken, Jacobsen, Koster, Sheldon, Costa, Radcliff, Lambert, Robertson, Carrell, Backlund, Ballasiotes, Skinner, Huff, Johnson, Thompson, Elliot, Wolfe, Talcott, Conway, Kremen, Campbell, Benton, Mason, Cooke and Kessler.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/21/95, 2/24/95 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Carlson, Chairman; Mulliken, Vice Chairman; Basich; Blanton; Delvin; Goldsmith and Sheahan.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Jacobsen, Ranking Minority Member; and Mastin.

Staff: Susan Hosch (786-7120).

Background:

National Guard Assistance Program

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 for termination 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.

Washington State National Guard Conditional Scholarship Program

In 1994, the Legislature created, but did not fund, the Washington State National Guard Conditional Scholarship program. Through the program, members of the National Guard below the rank of major may receive conditional scholarships to attend an institution of higher education in Washington. Participants must repay the scholarship, with interest, unless they serve in the National Guard for one additional year for each year of scholarship received. Funding for the scholarships may come from state or federal funds, private donations, or repayments from participants who do not meet their service obligation.

GI Bill Participation

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.

Tuition Waivers

State supported institutions of higher education may waive a student's tuition and fees through about 35 different waiver programs. Four of the programs permit students to attend a class if space is available. The space available waivers are limited to institutional employees, senior citizens, classified state employees, and, at community colleges only, unemployed and underemployed persons. The institutions do not receive any state funds for students who are enrolled in these space available waiver programs.

Summary of Bill: With the exception of technical colleges, state colleges and universities are permitted to waive tuition and service and activities fees for members of the Washington National Guard enrolled on a space available basis. These students will not be included in official enrollment reports, and the institutions will not receive any state funding for them.

Members of the National Guard and institutional employees who enroll on a space available basis will be charged a fee that will fully cover institutional administrative costs of enrolling the student.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Members of the National Guard need education and training to progress through the ranks. Statistics on the recruitment and retention of new members of the guard indicate that Washington has the highest recruitment rate and lowest retention rates in the country. The coffers of the state are annually enriched by five to six million dollars as a result of the presence of the National Guard in the state. As the national budget is reduced, Congress will measure each state's contribution to the Guard when allocating funds. Washington is the only state with no state educational benefits. In contrast, six states waive tuition and fees completely for members of the Guard.

Testimony Against: The community and technical college system is against creating new waivers or extending existing waivers to new groups of students. Very few spaces are available in public institutions. In giving these waivers to members of the Guard, the legislature is holding out a potentially false hope that opportunities will be available when no such opportunities are likely to be there. Appropriating money to the National Guard Scholarship Program created last year would be preferable to this approach.

Testified: Representative Dave Schmidt, prime sponsor; Maureen Flak, National Guard Association of Washington (pro); and Scott Morgan, State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (con).