

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2233

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Education

Title: An act relating to prioritizing tuition waivers for war veterans.

Brief Description: Mandating that a percentage of tuition waivers be granted to veterans.

Sponsors: Representatives Kristiansen, B. Sullivan, Cox, Sells, Woods, Rodne, Bailey, Pearson, Strow, Campbell, Serben, O'Brien, Ahern, Kretz and Murray.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education & Workforce Education: 1/20/06, 2/2/06 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- States the Legislature's intent to make waivers available to all eligible admitted veterans.
- Requires institutions of higher education to engage in outreach activities to increase the number of veterans who receive tuition waivers.
- Institutions of higher education must revise their applications for admission to provide applicants with the opportunity to indicate whether they are veterans who need assistance.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Kenney, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Cox, Ranking Minority Member; Rodne, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Dunn, Fromhold, Hasegawa, Jarrett, Ormsby, Priest, Roberts and Sommers.

Staff: Nina Oman (786-7152).

Background:

Veterans Qualifying Under State Law

Institutions of higher education may waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for an eligible veteran or National Guard member, defined as a person who:

- has a domicile in Washington;
- was an active or reserve member of the United States military or naval forces or a National Guard member called to active duty;
- served in active federal service;
- served in a war or conflict fought on foreign soil or in another location in support of those serving on foreign soil or in international waters; and
- if discharged, received an honorable discharge.

Tuition waivers are also allowed for:

- a child and the spouse of an eligible veteran (or National Guard member) who became totally disabled while engaged in active federal military or naval service, or who is determined by the federal government to be a prisoner of war or missing in action; and
- a child and the surviving spouse of an eligible veteran (or National Guard member) who lost his or her life while engaged in active federal military or naval service. Upon remarriage, the surviving spouse is no longer eligible for a waiver.

The institutions may also offer waivers to a military or naval veteran who resides in Washington but who did not serve on foreign soil or in international waters or in another location in support of those serving on foreign soil or in international waters, but no state funding support is provided for these waivers.

Tuition Waivers

Tuition waivers offered in 2003-04 totaled \$86 million at the four-year institutions, and \$66.4 million at the community colleges.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Legislature intends to make waivers available to all eligible admitted veterans. The institutions of higher education must engage in outreach activities to increase the number of veterans who receive tuition waivers. Institutions of higher education must revise their applications for admission to provide applicants with the opportunity to indicate whether they are veterans who need assistance.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Technical changes were made to correct references to statutes.

Institutions of higher education must participate in outreach activities to increase the number of veterans who receive tuition waivers. The institutions must also revise their admissions applications to give applicants an opportunity to indicate whether they are veterans who need assistance.

The Legislature intends to make waivers of operating fees available to all eligible admitted veterans.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support) There is nothing in Washington statute that states the amount of funding available for veteran tuition waivers. We have many veterans in our state, and other states provide more tuition assistance for veterans than Washington does. Washington's tuition assistance is embarrassingly low. Federal assistance does not provide enough funding, and there is a 10-year limit on benefits. Many veterans who are yet to be discharged will need education benefits. Washington was the first state to recognize the contribution of tomorrow's veterans with a memorandum of understanding. Tuition benefits are a way to put some force to the memo, and a small way to say "thank you."

(With concerns) We support the policy behind the bill. Our concerns are technical and relate to the 10 percent requirement. For example, one university now serves 96 veterans at \$260,000, representing 100 percent of eligible admitted veterans. If we can't award \$500,000 to veterans, our total waiver program would be reduced from \$5 million to \$2.6 million. Suggestions for serving more veterans include: revising the definition of an eligible veteran, conducting more outreach, or revising the bill language to say waivers "shall be made available" rather than "shall be granted."

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kristiansen, prime sponsor; and Skip Dreps, Dave Zurfluh, and Ernie Butler, Paralyzed Veterans of American-Northwest Chapter.

(With concerns) Deborah Frazier, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; Randy Hodgins, University of Washington; and Jeff Gombosky, Eastern Washington University.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.