

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5002

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to tuition waivers for veterans' families.

Brief Description: Changing tuition waivers for families of fallen veterans and national guard members.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Hewitt, Pflug, Honeyford, Swecker, Morton, Stevens, Parlette, Delvin, McCaslin, Schoesler and Sheldon).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 3/21/07, 3/29/07 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Changes college tuition waivers for families of eligible veterans and National Guard members to make waivers mandatory for certain children and spouses of veterans.
- Tuition waivers for children and spouses do not apply to the waiver limits established for the institutions.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Wallace, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Anderson, Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hasegawa, Jarrett, McIntire, Roberts and Sommers.

Staff: Andrew Colvin (786-7304).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Within certain limits, institutions may waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for eligible students. For these waivers, known as state-supported waivers, it is assumed that state moneys in the institutions' budgets will offset the tuition not collected from students as a result of granting the waivers. This authority to grant state-supported waivers is capped for each institution at a certain percentage of the total tuition revenue the institution collects. Within its respective percentage caps, each institution decides how to apportion its waiver authority among the various categories of state-supported permissive waivers.

Eligible Veterans and National Guard Members

Eligible veterans and National Guard members means Washington residents who are, or were:

- active duty or reserve military members or National Guard members; and
- called to active federal service in a war or conflict fought on foreign soil or in international waters, or in support of others serving on foreign soil or in international waters.

Veterans and National Guard members who have been discharged from active federal service must have received an honorable discharge in order to be eligible for a waiver.

Waivers Based Upon Veteran Status

Within state-supported waiver authority, institutions of higher education may waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for:

- an eligible veteran or National Guard member;
- the child or spouse of an eligible veteran or National Guard member who was totally disabled in the line of duty, or who is listed as missing in action (MIA) or a prisoner of war (POW); and
- the surviving child or spouse of an eligible veteran or National Guard member killed in the line of duty. Upon remarriage, however, the surviving spouse no longer is eligible for a waiver.

The federal Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program provides funds for education and training to eligible dependents of certain veterans, including veterans who, in the line of duty, died, are permanently and totally disabled, are missing in action, or captured.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The waivers for a child and spouse are made mandatory, conditions are specified for eligibility, and the conditions apply the same whether the eligible veteran was totally disabled, MIA/POW, or killed. To qualify for a tuition waiver, the following conditions apply:

- for both a child and spouse the individual receiving the waiver must be a Washington resident;

- a child must be between 17 and 26 years old. Marital status does not affect eligibility. A child must also meet the school's satisfactory progress policy to remain eligible for the waiver; and
- for a spouse, there is a 10-year time limit to receive the tuition waiver. The 10 years is measured from the date of the veteran's death, disability, or federal determination of POW or MIA status. Also, a spouse becomes ineligible for the tuition waiver upon remarriage.

Tuition and fees waived for children and surviving spouses of eligible veterans do not apply to the limits placed on institutions with respect to operating fees revenue.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

It is clarified that waivers granted shall not affect the permissive waivers that will continue to be available to veterans.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is about recognizing the sacrifices made by veterans and their families. Although there is some federal support for spouses and children, it is not enough. Also, it currently takes around a year for federal benefits to even be available. Education is important, and this tuition waiver would allow dependents to pursue higher education and keep alive the dreams those who sacrificed their lives in service had for their loved ones.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Hewitt, prime sponsor; Skip Dreps, Northwest Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America; Nicole Smith; and Dick Marcelynas, Veterans Legislative Coalition.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.