

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1052

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to early registration at institutions of higher education for spouses or domestic partners of military members.

Brief Description: Requiring institutions of higher education to make an early registration process available to spouses and domestic partners of active members of the military.

Sponsors: Representatives Hayes, Fey, Klippert, Orwall, Appleton, Muri, MacEwen, Gregerson, Haler, Bergquist, Moeller, Riccelli and Magendanz.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 1/28/15, 2/6/15, 2/10/15 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the early course registration process that is available for eligible veterans and National Guard members to be offered to spouses receiving veteran education benefits.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Gregory, Hargrove, Holy, Reykdal, Sells, Stambaugh, Tarleton and Van Werven.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

Early Course Registration.

At public institutions of higher education, student course registration order is usually based on the number of credits a student has been awarded by the attending institution, sometimes

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referred to as "class standing." Priority registration varies depending on each institution's policy, and some institutions do not offer priority registration.

Institutions that offer an early course registration period for any segment of the student population must also have a process in place to offer students who are eligible veterans or National Guard members early course registration. Eligible veterans and National Guard members who are:

- new students and have completed all of their admission processes must be offered an early course registration period; and
- continuing and returning former students who have met enrollment requirements must be offered early course registration among continuing students with the same level of class standing or credit as determined by the attending institution and the institutional policies.

In order to be eligible, a veteran or National Guard member must be residing in Washington and have been an active or reserve member of the United States military or naval forces, or a National Guard member called to active duty, who served in active federal service, in a war or conflict fought on foreign soil or in international waters or in another location in support of those serving on foreign soil or in international waters, and who, if discharged from service, has received an honorable discharge.

Veterans in Higher Education.

During the 2013-14 academic year, public baccalaureate institutions in Washington served just under 3,000 veterans. In fiscal year 2014, the community and technical colleges served just over 18,000 veterans and almost 4,000 dependents. Institutions of higher education provide a variety of benefits for veterans and their families pursuing higher education. State law permits that 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 or a prisoner of war; or
- the surviving child or spouse of an eligible veteran or National Guard member killed in the line of duty, however, upon remarriage the surviving spouse no longer is eligible for a waiver.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides service members with 36 months of education benefits and allows service members to transfer unused education benefits to spouses and children. The service member must have at least six years of service and must commit to an additional four years of service in order to transfer GI Bill benefits to a spouse or child. In addition, the transfer request must be submitted and approved while the member is on active duty. A spouse may use the benefits immediately upon transfer or at a later day, even after the service member separates from active duty, as long as the benefits are used within 15 years.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The early course registration process available for eligible veterans and National Guard members must be offered to spouses receiving veteran education benefits. The provisions expire August 1, 2022.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill changed the category of spouses who are eligible for early course registration from spouses of active duty military members to spouses receiving veteran education benefits.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is an extension of the help given to veterans last year by giving it to spouses. Active duty military members need to be taken care of when they are deployed, but so do the spouses that are left behind to run the household. It is peace of mind for the military member deployed. A military spouse is subject to the same schedule restrictions as their partner, even when they are left behind when their spouse deploys. Priority registration allows the spouse to establish a routine which helps them be responsible for the duties at home that double when their partner deploys. Registration every 11 weeks disrupts the schedule, and this can be so disruptive that it cause spouses to consider dropping out. Early registration helps coordinate and maximize GI Bill benefits which can be transferred to spouses. The GI Bill only includes 36 months of benefits, so early registration helps ensure students get the courses they need.

(With concerns) It is important to support the biggest supporters of the military which is the family. However, the priority registration process does not allow veteran spouses to register early. The main goal for early registration is allowing those to register that are the closest to finishing their degree. There are some nuances to iron out. One piece to think about is that a lot of students are single parents that deal with the same issues on a day-to-day basis.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Hayes, prime sponsor; Christian Arciniega; Mark San Souci, Department of Defense; Ted Wicorek and Dick Marcelynas, Veteran Legislative Coalition; Heather Heffelmire, Western Washington University; and Jordan Martin, Associated Students of Eastern Washington University.

(With concerns) Scott Copeland, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.