

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5561

As Passed Senate, February 11, 2016

Title: An act relating to veteran survivor tuition waiver eligibility.

Brief Description: Concerning veteran survivor tuition waiver eligibility.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Bailey, Kohl-Welles, Frockt, Honeyford, Hewitt, Rolfes, McAuliffe and Angel).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education: 2/05/15, 2/10/15 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means: 2/23/15, 2/26/15 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 2/11/16, 49-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Bailey, Chair; Baumgartner, Vice Chair; Frockt, Ranking Member; Becker, Liias, Miloscia and Kohl-Welles.

Staff: Evan Klein (786-7483)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5561 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hill, Chair; Braun, Vice Chair; Dammeier, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Hargrove, Ranking Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Member on the Capital Budget; Ranker, Ranking Minority Member, Operating; Bailey, Becker, Billig, Brown, Conway, Fraser, Hasegawa, Hewitt, O'Ban, Padden, Parlette, Rolfes, Schoesler, Warnick, Hatfield and Kohl-Welles.

Staff: Michele Alishahi (786-7433)

Background: Washington Military Tuition Waiver. Subject to the limitations on the total amount of operating fees that each Washington institution of higher education may waive, the institutions of higher education may waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for an eligible veteran or National Guard member. An eligible veteran or National Guard member is a

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Washington domiciliary who was on active or reserve duty in the United States armed forces, or a National Guard member called to active duty who served in a war or conflict fought on foreign soil or in international waters and if discharged from service, was discharged honorably.

Washington institutions of higher education may also waive tuition for veterans or National Guard members who did not serve on foreign soil, in international waters, or in another location in support of those serving on foreign soil or international waters, but the institution receives no state general fund support for these waivers.

The institutions of higher education must waive all tuition and fees for:

- a child and spouse or domestic partner, or surviving spouse or domestic partner, of an eligible veteran or National Guard member who became totally disabled as a result of active service, or who is a prisoner of war; and
- a child and the surviving spouse or domestic partner of an eligible veteran or National Guard member who lost their life as a result of serving in active duty.

A child must be a Washington domiciliary between the age of 17 and 26 to be eligible for this tuition waiver.

Federal Periods of Eligibility. A child of a person who died in service or has a total disability related to serving in the United States armed forces is eligible for federal educational assistance if the child is between the age of 18 and 26 or successfully completed secondary schooling. The child may also be eligible for educational assistance before turning age 18 or for an extended period past the age of 26 under eight defined circumstances.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill: A child of a veteran or National Guard member is eligible for a full tuition waiver at a Washington State institution of higher education if one of the child's parents became totally disabled as a result of active service, was a prisoner of war, or lost their life as a result of serving in active duty, and the child:

- is a Washington domiciliary between the age of 17 and 26; or
- meets one of eight federal requirements for receiving education assistance.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Higher Education): PRO: This bill allows veterans to choose the federal Department of Defense benefit or the state waiver, because it captures eight categories of veterans that are provided tuition assistance under federal law but not currently under state law.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education): PRO: Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Antonio Sanchez, Central WA University; Cody Eccles, Council of Presidents.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Ways & Means): PRO: We support this bill. This will allow our institutions to keep serving our veterans and their families. It will help prevent a small number of students from aging out of their benefits.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Cody Eccles, Council of Presidents.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.