

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5826

As Passed House:
April 7, 2017

Title: An act relating to eligibility for veteran or national guard tuition waivers.

Brief Description: Concerning eligibility for veteran or national guard tuition waivers.

Sponsors: Senators Hobbs, Zeiger, O'Ban, Conway, Fain, Keiser, Hunt and Saldaña.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 3/15/17, 3/22/17 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/7/17, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Modifies the definition of "eligible veteran or National Guard member" used for tuition waivers to include military, Navy, or National Guard members on active duty who served in support of those serving on foreign soil or in international waters, without requiring the support service to have been provided in another location.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Pollet, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Minority Member; Van Werven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Haler, Orwall, Sells, Stambaugh and Tarleton.

Staff: Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

Background:

State law requires and authorizes the public institutions of higher education to grant various tuition and fee waivers. The institutions are limited in their tuition and fee waiver authority in that the total amount of tuition and fee revenue waived, exempted, or reduced may not exceed a percentage of their estimated gross operating fee revenue.

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.

The public institutions of higher education have authority to waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for eligible veterans and National Guard members, but the institutions are required to waive tuition and fees for a child, spouse, or domestic partner of an eligible veteran or National Guard member who became totally disabled, is determined to be a prisoner of war or missing in action, or lost his or her life due to serving in active federal military or naval service. In addition, the institutions may waive tuition and fees 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 institutions are prohibited from receiving any State General Fund support for these waivers.

For the purposes of the tuition waivers, "eligible veteran or National Guard member" is defined as "a Washington domiciliary who was 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, under either Title 10 or Title 32 of the United States Code, 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 if discharged from service, has received an honorable discharge."

Summary of Bill:

For the purposes of tuition waivers, the definition of "eligible veteran or National Guard member" is changed so the definition includes all Washington domiciliaries who:

- were active or reserve members of the United States military, Navy, or National Guard; and
- were called to active duty; and
- served in active service in a war or conflict fought on foreign soil or in international waters; or
- served in support of those serving on foreign soil or in international waters; and
- if discharged from service, received an honorable discharge.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The definition of "eligible veteran or National Guard member" was not written very clearly, and as a result some National Guard members were turned away from the tuition waiver at a community college. A service member stationed at home for training may get the tuition waiver, but the National Guard member stationed at home for training may be denied the tuition waiver. Recruiters often use the tuition waiver as an incentive for recruits, but this has recently been a problem and significantly impacts recruitment. If any resident signs up to defend the United States, he or she should be considered a veteran. There should be no

interpretation as to whether a National Guard member qualifies as a veteran. This does not change the permissive waiver to a requirement, it just makes the definition clearer.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Hobbs, prime sponsor; Brian Eagen, Washington Army National Guard; and Martina Culich, Washington Air National Guard.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.