

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5197

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As of February 8, 2019

**Title:** An act relating to the Washington national guard postsecondary education grant program.

**Brief Description:** Concerning the Washington national guard postsecondary education grant program.

**Sponsors:** Senators Hobbs, Zeiger, Wagoner, Short, Bailey, Hunt, Fortunato and Keiser; by request of Military Department.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/24/19, 1/29/19 [DP-WM].

**Ways & Means:** 2/07/19.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Renames the Washington National Guard Conditional Scholarship Program and the Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant program.
- Establishes award amount is subject to appropriation but may be equal to the cost of tuition and fees, less other financial aid, plus a books and materials stipend.
- Requires eligible participants in the program incur an obligation to repay the grant unless they serve in the Washington National Guard for one year for each year that they receive the award.

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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

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

Signed by Senators Palumbo, Chair; Randall, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Brown, Liias and Wellman.

**Staff:** Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

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*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.*

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Staff:** Daniel Masterson (786-7454)

**Background:** The Washington State National Guard Conditional Scholarship program was created in 1994, and is administered by the Office of the Adjutant General of the State Military Department. It provides scholarships to eligible members of the Washington National Guard who continue their service after receiving funds. The scholarship is in the form of a loan that is forgiven if the recipient completes the requisite service time in the Washington National Guard. For each academic year of credit that a student receives scholarship money, the student must remain an active or participating member for 12 additional months. Scholarship recipients who do not fulfill the service obligation are required to repay the loaned funds plus 8 percent interest.

Scholarship recipients must complete courses at institutions of higher education located in Washington State that are accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. The student's goal must be a degree or certificate program. Additionally, the student must maintain a 2.5 cumulative grade point average and individual course grades of 2.5 or better.

The federal Montgomery G.I. Bill provides education benefits that may be used while on active duty or after separation from active duty and by members of the Selected Reserve of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, and the Army and Air National Guard. Eligibility criteria and benefits vary depending on the type and date of enlistment and on the nature of the educational program. Approved training programs under the Montgomery G.I. Bill include degree programs, certificate or correspondence courses, cooperative training, independent study programs, apprenticeship or on-the-job training, and vocational flight training programs.

**Summary of Bill:** The Washington National Guard Conditional Scholarship program is renamed the Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant Program. A student is eligible for the grant program if:

- they are a member of the Washington National Guard;
- attend an accredited institution in Washington State;
- a baccalaureate degree or higher from any postsecondary institution has not been awarded;
- they are an active drilling member in good standing in the Washington National Guard;
- they have completed and submitted an application for student aid;
- they are a resident student; and
- they agree to fulfill the student's service obligation.

Subject to the amount appropriated for the grants, an eligible student may receive an award up to the cost of tuition and fees, less other federal, state, and institutional grant or waiver aid. In addition, eligible students may receive up to \$500 for books and materials.

Eligibility is limited to five years or 125 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled.

Eligible participants in the grant program incur an obligation to repay the grant with interest, unless they serve in the Washington National Guard for one year for each year that they receive the award.

The Office of Student Financial Assistance is responsible for administering the grant program, coordinating with the Washington Military Department in selecting eligible participants, and developing rules related to repayment obligations.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 17, 2019.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Higher Education & Workforce Development):**

PRO: This bill is for members of the National Guard who are pursuing their educational hopes and dreams. This is a crisis of strength for the national guard, both the Army and Air side. Those that fight the fires and the floods are these men and women. We compete with other states and Oregon has free tuition for their guard members. The Washington National Guard is struggling to recruit crew and retain our members due in part to the strong economy. Benefits like this would allow us to retain National Guard members. Our members right now are the lowest they have ever been and that threatens our organizations ability to provide lifesaving support to our communities and also disaster response. Many other states have addressed this issue by themselves through tuition assistance. We are also aware that members of our guard have transferred to the Oregon National Guard because of the benefit down there. Recruiters use it when recruiting along Washington's southern border. We want to provide the opportunity for career advancement that higher education brings to our members. We appreciate that the Governor's budget supported this legislation with \$3 million. The entire Army and Air National Guard are in support of this bill.

**Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development):** PRO: Senator Steve Hobbs, Prime Sponsor; Steve DuPont, Central Washington University; Major General Bret Daugherty, Commander, Washington National Guard, Director Washington Military Department; Scott Humphrey, National Guard Association of Washington.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development):** No one.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means):** PRO: The Washington National Guard is struggling to recruit and retain our members right now. It is a combination of a great economy and also a lot of competition, including the state of Oregon that also passed a bill giving free tuition. Washingtonians can, and do, join other guards in other states. There are a lot of pressures that come on our members of the military. This is an added benefit that would hopefully keep them in service. Only about 25 to 30 percent of the young people in our country meet the entrance requirements to be in the military and everybody is recruiting and trying to hire those youth. Our personnel numbers are the lowest they have been I think

since the end of the draft at the end of the Vietnam War. This threatens our organization's ability to provide lifesaving assistance and help the communities respond following a natural disaster here in our state. Many other states have already addressed this issue by offering tuition assistance to their members. There are 36 states in the country that offer tuition assistance to members of the National Guard. This bill is needed. The time has come. Evergreen currently serves one of the highest percentage of veterans of any of the institutions. By giving National Guard members additional resources to further their education, this bill honors their service and will help our state compete with neighboring guard units such as Oregon who already offer free tuition. We would like to see our guard members staying in state and attending our institutions.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** PRO: Senator Steve Hobbs, Prime Sponsor; Jeremy Mohn, The Evergreen State College; Major General Bret Daugherty, Commander, Washington National Guard, Adjutant General, Director Washington Military Department; Robert Sweeney, National Guard Association of Washington.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means):** No one.