

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5755

As of February 26, 2019

Title: An act relating to veteran and national guard tuition waivers.

Brief Description: Concerning veteran and national guard tuition waivers.

Sponsors: Senators Randall, Hobbs and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/07/19, 2/14/19 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Ways & Means: 2/25/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases mandatory tuition and fee waiver from 200 credits to 250 credits for gold star families.
- Expands the definition of eligible veteran or National Guard member for the purposes of tuition waivers at higher education institutions to include veteran or National Guard members who received a general discharge under honorable conditions.

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; Lias and Wellman.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.
Signed by Senators Holy, Ranking Member; Brown.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Daniel Masterson (786-7454)

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.

Background: Washington Military Tuition Waiver. Higher education institutions may waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for an eligible veteran or National Guard member, subject to limitations. An eligible veteran or National Guard member is a Washington resident 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 higher education institutions 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.

Mandatory tuition and fee waivers are provided by higher education institutions for eligible gold star families; defined as:

- 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.

Military Discharge Classifications. When a military member is released from their service obligation with the United States Armed Forces, they receive a discharge. There are different types of discharge classifications based on why or how the service member left the military. The service member's eligibility for veteran and military benefits, including education benefits, changes based on the discharge they receive. There are two categories of discharges—administrative and punitive.

Administrative discharges include:

1. Honorable Discharge—The service member received a good or excellent rating for their service time and is eligible for all veteran benefits, including the GI Bill.
2. General Discharge, Under Honorable Conditions—The service member received a satisfactory rating because the individual failed to meet all expectations of conduct, and they received a non-judicial punishment to correct the misbehavior or failure to meet standards. The service member is eligible for most veteran and military benefits, including education assistance, but is not eligible for the GI Bill.
3. Other Than Honorable Discharge—The service member failed to meet or violated military conduct standards. Examples for an other than honorable discharge include security violations, conviction by a civilian court with a sentence including prison time, or being found guilty of adultery in a divorce hearing. The service member is not usually eligible for veteran and military benefits.

Punitive discharges include bad conduct discharge, dishonorable discharge, officer discharge, or entry level separation.

Summary of Bill: The mandatory tuition and fee waiver provided to families of eligible veterans or national guard members who were totally disabled, POW's, or lost their life as a result of serving in active duty are increased from 200 credits to 250 credits.

Military members who received a general discharge under honorable conditions are added to the definition of eligible veteran or national guard member for optional tuition and fee waivers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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 about recognizing the service of our service members and ensuring the next pathway is open to them. Expanding access to veterans in the form of optional and mandatory waivers is something that we would love to do. As a veteran I wholeheartedly support this legislation. We do have concerns about the fiscal impact of the expansion of these waivers.

Persons Testifying (Higher Education & Workforce Development): PRO: Senator Emily Randall, Prime Sponsor; Ruben Flores, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: This is a good policy. It does not cost a whole lot and we feel the universities can incur the cost for the members in our society that paid some of the greatest debts and contributed to our society by serving in our armed forces.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Adan Espino Jr., Student Lobbyist, Associated Students of the University of Washington Tacoma.

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