

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5545

---

---

**As Passed House:**

March 2, 2022

**Title:** An act relating to survivor benefits.

**Brief Description:** Concerning survivor benefits.

**Sponsors:** Senators Wagoner, Conway, Dhingra, Lovick, Mullet, Short and Wilson, J..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

College & Workforce Development: 2/21/22, 2/23/22 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 3/2/22, 95-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Modifies the mandatory tuition waiver for spouses and domestic partners of eligible veterans and National Guard members who lost their lives in service, became totally and permanently disabled, or are determined to be prisoners of war or missing in action.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Chambers, Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Hansen, Hoff, Kraft, Paul, Pollet and Sells.

**Staff:** Megan Mulvihill (786-7304).

**Background:**

---

*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

### 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.

Higher education institutions must waive all tuition and fees for:

- a child and the 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.

The surviving spouse or domestic partner of the eligible veteran or National Guard member has 10 years from the date of the event to receive benefits.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The tuition waiver for surviving spouses and domestic partners of eligible veterans or National Guard members is modified in two ways:

- the 10 year time period for which the person must use the waiver begins based on whichever qualifying event occurs last; and
- federal determination of service-connected death or total disability is added to the list of events which qualifies a person for the waiver.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**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) This legislation rights a bureaucratic wrong for a small group of people, but an important group of people, who are the surviving spouses of military members. This issue was brought forward by a constituent whose husband passed away. Sometimes the verification of the service-relatedness of the cause of death takes a long time to receive. In the constituent's experience, that verification took seven years, and by that time, the eligibility time period for the tuition waiver was almost over. This changes the time when the clock starts.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Keith Wagoner, prime sponsor.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.