

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5162

As Passed House - Amended:

April 11, 1995

Title: An act relating to tuition exemptions for veterans.

Brief Description: Changing the Vietnam veterans' tuition exemption.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Bauer, Oke, Snyder, Hargrove, Haugen, Kohl, C. Anderson and Winsley).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 3/16/95, 3/24/95 [DPA];

Appropriations: 4/3/95 [DPA(HE/APP)s].

Floor Activity:

Amended.

Passed House: 4/11/95, 92-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Carlson, Chairman; Mulliken, Vice Chairman; Mason, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; Benton; Blanton; Delvin; Goldsmith and Sheahan.

Staff: Susan Hosch (786-7120).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended by Committee on Higher Education as such amendment is amended by Committee on Appropriations. Signed by 30 members: Representatives Silver, Chairman; Clements, Vice Chairman; Huff, Vice Chairman; Pelesky, Vice Chairman; Sommers, Ranking Minority Member; Valle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; Brumsickle; Carlson; Chappell; Cooke; Crouse; Dellwo; G. Fisher; Foreman; Grant; Hargrove; Hickel; Jacobsen; Lambert; Lisk; McMorris; Poulsen; Reams; Rust; Sehlin; Sheahan; Talcott; Thibaudeau and Wolfe.

Staff: Jennifer Priddy (786-7118).

Background: Washington has three tuition and fee waiver programs for military veterans attending public baccalaureate institutions and community colleges. Through one program, institutions may waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for veterans who served between World War I and World War II or during any period of war, if the veterans have exhausted all federal educational benefits for veterans. Through another, institutions may exempt Washington residents who served in the Persian Gulf Combat Zone from all or a portion of tuition and fee increases occurring after the 1990-91 academic year. Eligibility criteria includes a requirement that the veterans take seven or more quarter credits per term and that they have an adjusted gross family income at or below the state's median family income. The third program is a tuition and fee waiver program for Vietnam veterans.

The Vietnam veterans' tuition exemption or waiver has been in effect in some form since 1971. As amended in 1994, it permits public baccalaureate institutions and community colleges to exempt eligible Vietnam veterans from all or a portion of tuition and fee increases adopted after October 1, 1977. In order to receive the waiver, a veteran must meet a number of conditions. First, the veteran must have served on active duty in the military or naval forces of the United States in the Southeast Asia theater of operations anytime between August 5, 1964 to May 7, 1975. In addition, the veteran must be a resident student at the time of enrollment and must have been enrolled in a public college or university before May 7, 1990. The 1994 Legislature added three additional conditions. First, the veteran must remain continuously enrolled for at least seven credits per term, except summer session, and not including community service courses. Next, the veteran must have exhausted all entitlement to federal educational benefits conferred because of military service. Finally, the veteran must have an adjusted gross family income at or below the state's median family income. The waiver program for Vietnam veterans expires on June 30, 1997.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature intends to honor Vietnam veterans for the public service they have provided to their country. The Legislature further intends that, for eligible Vietnam veterans, baccalaureate institutions and community colleges waive tuition and fee increases that have occurred since October 1, 1977.

Public baccalaureate institutions and community colleges may exempt eligible Vietnam veterans from some or all of any tuition and fee increases adopted after October 1, 1977. In order to receive the waiver, veterans must meet these conditions: (1) be a veteran who served on active duty in the military or naval forces of the United States anytime between August 5, 1964 to May 7, 1975; (2) have served in the Southeast Asia theater of operations; (3) be a resident student at the time of enrollment; and (4) have an adjusted gross family income at or below the state's median family income. Institutions shall give priority to veterans who were residents of the state when they entered the military.

Current law is amended to remove certain requirements that Vietnam veterans must meet in order to qualify for a tuition and fee waiver. Removed are the requirements that Vietnam veterans must: have been enrolled on or before May 7, 1990; remain continuously enrolled for seven or more credit hours per term; and have exhausted all entitlement to federal veterans' vocational or educational benefits.

The authority to waive tuition and fee increases for Vietnam veterans expires on June 30, 1999, instead of June 30, 1997.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: (Higher Education) The requirements adopted last year for the Vietnam veterans' waiver program created a hardship for veterans and caused a dramatic decline in the number of veterans who qualified for a tuition and fee waiver. Some veterans had their tuition bills quadrupled as a result of the changes. Reinstating the waiver law in effect before the 1994 session would assist Vietnam veterans to complete education and training programs they started before the 1994 law went into effect.

(Appropriations) The eligibility requirements currently in statute significantly restrict a veterans' ability to attend college. Since the enactment of the restrictions, the number of veterans who receive a waiver has dropped off significantly. The requirement that veterans have a family income below the state median income is prohibitive because it is based on the income of the previous year. Thus, in cases of recent unemployment or other changes, many veterans may not be eligible for a waiver. The extension of the waiver program through June 1999 is a positive component of the legislation.

Testimony Against: (Higher Education) Concerns were expressed about the cost to the colleges of any waiver program. A suggestion was made that the Legislature fund this and other waiver programs with money from the general fund.

(Appropriations) None.

Testified: (Higher Education) Senator Albert Bauer, prime sponsor; Beau Bergeron, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs; Ed Madden, student and Vietnam veteran; and Scott Morgan, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

(Appropriations) Senator Albert Bauer, prime sponsor; Representative Don Carlson; Ed Madden, Vietnam Veteran; and Beau Bergeron, Director, Washington Department of Veteran's Affairs