

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5545

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As Passed Senate, February 15, 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:** Higher Education & Workforce Development: 1/13/22, 1/20/22 [DP].

**Floor Activity:** Passed Senate: 2/15/22, 49-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Clarifies that a surviving spouse or domestic partner of an eligible veteran or National Guard member is eligible for tuition waiver benefits for ten years after the death, total disability, or POW or MIA status of the eligible veteran or National Guard member.
- Adds the date of federal determination of death or total disability as a qualifying event for the ten year period of eligibility for the waiver.

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

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Randall, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Lias and Sefzik.

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

**Background:** Washington Military Tuition Waiver. Higher education institutions may

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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 (POW); 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 ten years from the date of the event to receive benefits.

**Summary of Bill:** A surviving spouse or surviving domestic partner of the eligible veteran or national guard member has ten years to receive tuition waiver benefits under the waiver from the last recurring event:

- date of death;
- date of total disability;
- federal determination of service-connected death or total disability; or
- federal determination of POW or missing in action status.

**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:** PRO: Often we know that the letter of the law doesn't meet the bar of the intent of the law. This bill is a chance to correct that. It is the intent of the state to allow tuition benefits for veteran survivors. However, sometimes real life gets in the way. This was brought by a constituent whose husband passed away. It took seven years in the VA system to get the death characterized correctly as service related. During that time, the survivor lost her eligibility for something the state intends for her to benefit from. This legislation corrects for that.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Keith Wagoner, Prime Sponsor.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.