

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1943

As Reported by House Committee On:
Postsecondary Education & Workforce
Appropriations

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

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

Sponsors: Representatives Leavitt, Jacobsen, Ryu, Rule, Christian, Couture, Bronoske, Slatter, Chambers, Reeves, Reed, Graham, Timmons, Orwall, Paul, Riccelli and Shavers.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Postsecondary Education & Workforce: 1/10/24, 1/12/24 [DP];
Appropriations: 1/22/24, 2/1/24 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands eligibility for the Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant to the spouse or dependent of a Washington National Guard member.
- Extends eligibility for the Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant from five years or 125 percent of the published length of the student's program to six years or 150 percent of the published length of the student's program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Reed, Vice Chair; Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Jacobsen, Klicker, Leavitt, Nance, Pollet, Schmidt and Timmons.

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.

Staff: Saranda Ross (786-7068).

Background:

The Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant Program (Program), formerly the National Guard Conditional Scholarship Program, is administered by the Office of Student Financial Assistance (Office). The Office selects participants with the assistance of the Washington Military Department. To be eligible for the Program, an active drilling member of the Washington National Guard (Guard) who is in good standing must:

- attend an institution of higher education located in the state and accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges or an institution in the state that provides approved training under the Montgomery GI Bill;
- be enrolled in courses or a program that lead to a postsecondary degree or certificate;
- submit an application for student aid approved by the Office;
- be a resident student; and
- meet any additional selection criteria adopted by the Office.

Participants receive grants to help pay for postsecondary education program costs for up to five years or 125 percent of the published length of the program, or the credit or clock-hour equivalent. Participants incur an obligation to repay the grant, with interest, unless they serve in the Guard for one year for each year they received the grant. Grants may not result in a reduction of federal or other state financial aid and may not exceed:

- the cost of attendance when combined with all other public and private grants, scholarships, and waiver assistance;
- the maximum Washington College Grant, plus \$500 for books and supplies; or
- the annual cost of undergraduate tuition fees and services and activities fees at the University of Washington, plus an allowance for books and supplies.

Summary of Bill:

Eligible participants are expanded to include the spouse or dependent of a Guard member. The Guard member must designate their spouse or dependent and agree to fulfill his or her service obligation. A dependent is defined as a person enrolled as a dependent in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System. To be eligible for the Program, a designated spouse or dependent must:

- attend an institution of higher education located in the state and accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges or an institution in the state that provides approved training under the Montgomery GI Bill;
- be enrolled in courses or a program that leads to a postsecondary degree or certificate;
- submit an application for student aid approved by the Office;
- be a resident student; and
- meet any additional selection criteria adopted by the Office.

Guard members incur an obligation to repay the grant, with interest, unless they serve in the Guard for one year for each year they or their spouse or dependent received the grant. Grant eligibility is extended to six years or 150 percent of the published length of the program in which the participant is enrolled or the credit or clock-hour equivalent. The Office must adopt rules for an appeals process for Guard members who do not satisfy their service obligations under the Program.

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) There are approximately 8,000 Washington National Guard members in our state. They deploy overseas for federal missions and in the state during domestic emergencies such as wildfires, floods, and global pandemics. They are also our neighbors, the folks we see at the grocery store, the folks coaching our children's soccer games, the folks working at local businesses, and many more. They are uniquely part of our communities and without them our economy and communities would not be as strong. We need a robust educational system for our Guard members, as we do not want to lose them to other states with better educational support. This bill recognizes the sacrifices and commitment of Guard members and their families, keeps Washington competitive with other states, and acknowledges the significance of Guard member's families.

Since 1994 the Legislature has provided educational benefits to Guard members to help them achieve their higher education goals. Yet, less than 30 percent of Washington Guard members have postsecondary degrees. This bill expands the Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant Program to provide benefits to the families of Guard members and ensures Guard members, and their families, have additional time to pursue degrees. Ultimately, it enables Guard members and their families to achieve their dreams by choosing what works best for them. This bill also aligns with the Montgomery GI Bill. With strong marketing, this bill will also help with Washington National Guard recruitment and retainment efforts.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Mari Leavitt, prime sponsor; Bret Daugherty, Washington Military Department; Charles Wharton, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Collin Bannister, Associated Students of Washington State University; Breck Lebeque; and

Charles Barnett, National Guard Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Corry, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Connors, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Couture, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Callan, Chandler, Chopp, Davis, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Harris, Lekanoff, Pollet, Riccelli, Rude, Ryu, Sandlin, Schmick, Senn, Simmons, Slatter, Springer, Stokesbary, Stonier, Tharinger and Wilcox.

Staff: Kate Henry (786-7349).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Postsecondary Education & Workforce:

No new changes were recommended.

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) The University of Washington Tacoma has a large military-affiliated population; those students bring diverse thoughts and perspectives to campus. Ensuring members of the National Guard and their families can pursue higher education benefits our economy. This program is an investment in our state. Similar programs have been used to incentivize participation in higher education and continued service in the Washington Guard. The program could be used in order to fill shortages in mental and behavioral health specialties.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) There are approximately 8,000 Washington National Guard members in our state. This grant program has been funded since 2020. Less than 30 percent of Washington Guard members have postsecondary degrees. The expansion of the program to provide tuition benefits to spouses and dependents is modeled after the GI Bill. The expansion should be concurrent with the funding provided in the Governor's budget proposal.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Breck Lebegue; Charles Wharton, Veterans Legislative Coalition; and Reese Ramirez, Associated Students of the University of Washington Tacoma.

(Other) Bret Daugherty, Washington Military Department.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.