

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1943

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Higher Education & Workforce Development, February 21, 2024

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: Passed House: 2/9/24, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Higher Education & Workforce Development: 2/16/24, 2/21/24 [DP-WM].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adds spouses and dependents as designated by guard members as eligible recipients of the Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant Program.
- Expands eligibility for the grant program to up to six years or 150 percent of program length.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Nobles, Chair; Hansen, Vice Chair; Holy, Ranking Member; Hawkins and Randall.

Staff: Alicia Kinne-Clawson (786-7407)

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.

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 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 Washington National 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 in the Washington National Guard postsecondary education grant program are expanded to the spouse or dependent of a an active drilling 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 Enrolment Eligibility Reporting System. To be eligible for the Program, a designated spouse or dependent must:

- be enrolled in a course or program leading to a degree or certificate at 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;
- 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 Washington National 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 render service necessary to satisfy their service obligation under the Program.

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: This bill extends the timeline to use the benefits in this grant. These people serve our communities. This provides an opportunity to recruit and retain a strong national guard. With the current recruitment shortfalls, education benefits continue to be a draw. The downward trends in military interest are countered by two things: educational benefits and health care. This is good for family stability. My family is critical in my decision to continue to serve in the Washington National Guard. This bill goes a long way in recognizing the sacrifice of my family. This bill will weigh heavily in my decision to continue serving.

OTHER: At its core this bill provides the service member a choice in how they use an earned benefit. It aligns state policy with what is already provided in the federal benefits. If a military family chooses to make the investment in their spouse, we should choose to honor that. Or, if a member chooses to extend their service to enable a dependent to go to college, that will be a benefit to Washington.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Mari Leavitt, Prime Sponsor; Charles Wharton, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Jesse Morgan; Allen Acosta, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Charles Barnett, Bldg. 2 MILITIA Drive.

OTHER: Gent Welsh, Washington Military Department.

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