



Oregon

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House Committee on Veterans Affairs

SB 1563 - Dependent Tuition Waiver

Mr. Chair and members of the committee,

For the record my name is Val Conley and I am the Deputy Director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. I am here today to provide information regarding the adopted amendments to SB 1563.

This bill adds community colleges to ORS 351.656, which provides a tuition waiver for dependents of service members killed while on active duty and dependents of veterans who are 100 percent service-connected disabled or who died as a result of their service connected disabilities. The current statute requires the Oregon University System to offer the tuition waiver but does not include the community colleges. SB 1563's adopted amendments place community colleges in statute but with a much more limited pool of eligible recipients.

Although ODVA does support this bill, we would like to note that the amendment does not address the original intent of SB 338, which required community colleges to come up with a common set of policies that aligns with the OUS. In fact, this amendment creates another standard for community colleges.

Specifically, SB 1563 would reduce the eligibility of the waiver at community colleges to dependents and survivors of those killed while on active duty and those who died of a 100% service connected disability. It eliminates the survivors and dependents of those who died as a result of a service connected disability and eliminates the dependents of those veterans who are rated 100 percent service connected disabled.

We understand that the intent of these limitations was purposeful as it reduces the potential financial impact that the requirement would place on the community colleges.

One of the issues that ODVA is concerned about that is not addressed in this amendment, but seems to be a discussion point, is the Dependent Educational Assistance benefit offered through USDVA.

ODVA does not support DEA being considered as a source of federal dollars where that money will be required as payment for tuition. ODVA also does not support the policy that if a student is eligible for this allowance, then they will not qualify for the tuition waiver at community colleges.

As we have testified before, DEA is an allowance that is intended to help dependents and survivors while attending school. The money is not intended solely for the use of tuition payment. The allowance is paid directly to beneficiaries for many expenses including subsistence, tuition, books, fees, etc.

Let me note that while we have some disagreement on this policy, we still consider the community colleges an important partner in supporting student veterans and their dependents. We all want to do the right thing. SB 1563 is a step in that direction.

Thank you for your time today. I appreciate the work you have done and continue to do for Oregon veterans. I would be happy to answer any questions.