

HB 2158 Veterans In State Tuition

Testimony by Mark San Souci, 26 February 2013, Oregon House Veterans' Services & Emergency Preparedness Committee

Mister Chair and committee, on behalf of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, thank you for the opportunity to discuss and to express Department of Defense support for HB 2158 in an effort to 'Allows nonresident veterans discharged under other than dishonorable conditions to pay tuition and fees at Oregon resident rates.'

My name is Mark San Souci, Department of Defense Regional Liaison for Military Families for the Northwest, working for the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Family & Community Policy.

For 2013, this issue for the first time made our Ten Key Issue list after thorough surveying and review by respective military services, military family advocacy groups, and veterans groups.

Because the Post 9/11 GI Bill only pays in-state tuition and eligible fees, new veterans who settle in states other than their state of residence upon separating from the Service are initially charged "out-of-state" tuition, which means they must pay the difference between the resident and non-resident charges. "Out-of-State" or non-resident tuition is often 2 to 3 times that of "in-state" tuition. Waiving the time requirement for residency (provided separating Service members are completing the remaining steps to establish residency) will allow our heroic veterans to attend the first year at a state school within the amount paid through the GI Bill.

In the fiscal year ending October 2012, according to Defense Management Data Center figures, 1,361 active duty military members separated, or retired, and moved to Oregon. If some of them had never

lived in Oregon before, but had a goal to be a Duck or a Beaver or seek higher education in any of Oregon's fine schools, they would be subject to the difficulties of paying these costs out of pocket.

And while it is now law that GI Bill benefits now can be assigned to family members, by far the largest group of GI Bill recipients is still veterans themselves. State policies have adjusted in the last decade to allow active and reserve members to access in-state tuition rates, but separating service members (new veterans) must still usually fulfill established residency time requirements to obtain in state rates.

While there is a Yellow Ribbon Program included in the post 9/11 GI Bill, meant to supplement costs above the "in-state" tuition rate by matching contributions made by an institution of higher learning (IHL) towards veterans education, the institutions (not the states) enter these agreements, and the IHLs determine the amount of the contribution, the number of veterans supported, the degree programs covered and the duration of the program. Since Yellow Ribbon Program contributions are provided at the discretion of the IHL, they may not be available to the veteran.

As of today, 19 states have already recognized that waiving the time required to establish "residency" for tuition purposes benefits their state.

- These 19 states know that they can attract veteran students based on suitability of degree requirements and not necessarily on affordability (GI Bill directly pays the IHL for in-state tuition rates). These veterans will become residents and may establish long term affiliations with a state IHLs.
- They also know that other states that do not offer such consideration may inadvertently incentivize veterans to take their tuition benefits, and potential long-term contributions, to a state that allows them to establish residency for tuition purposes. Like their state!

States still have the right to assert other proof of residency requirements to show that the veteran intends to remain in the state (driver's license, voting, taxes, establishing a domicile, etc). Other salient points:

- Businesses need as many more high skilled people, from certificates to grad degrees, as can be produced;
- School officials I talk with like vets because they come with GI Bill funding.
- Veterans add a work ethic and leadership element other students find to be positive and congenial.
- Oregon is a popular state, and many vets stay here for your high quality of life, for careers, and for long-term residency.
- The generation of vets this targets includes almost all of whom have done multiple combat tours in Iraq/Afghanistan. That are 1% of our young people serving our nation; we need to incorporate them deeply into our communities.
- What we are seeking here is that new veterans have the opportunity to compete for existing "in-state" tuition slots, as opposed to the institution giving up an "out of state" admission for such purposes. Veterans would not be guaranteed admission, but would have to "compete" for entrance like anyone else.

Clearly, military veterans face huge challenges today to transition back into what we would hope to be productive in civilian society and successful lifestyle. We believe this measure to help with the educational transition aids greatly in the transition. The proposed policy consideration in this measure will help level the playing field for our veterans so they can meet their family's financial needs while continuing the educational opportunities so needed for a successful transition.

In closing, we are grateful for the tremendous effort that Oregon has historically provided in supporting our service members and their families, including the veterans academic and occupational credit bill last year and the others before that.

I wish to thank this committee for taking up this measure, and appreciate that you have been a champion for us for many years.

I stand by for any questions you may have.