

House Bill 4023

Promoting the Success of Oregon Veterans in Community Colleges: The Veteran's Resource Coordinator Model

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Background

- Executive Summary: Purpose of HB 4023
- Analysis of HB 4023
- Profile of the Oregon Veteran
- Profile of a Student Veteran

The Veteran's Resource Coordinator Model

- Veteran's Resource Coordinators: The Benefit to Veterans
- Veterans' Resource Coordinator: The Benefit to Community Colleges
- Current Veteran's Resource Center and Veteran's Resource Coordinator Models in Oregon Community Colleges

The Partnership for Success

- CCWD and ODVA: A Unique Partnership to Serve a Unique Need

Exhibit A: Current Job Posting for a Veteran's Resource Coordinator

Executive Summary: Purpose of HB 4023

The purpose of House Bill 4023 is to help Oregon veterans successfully transition from military service to community college life and from community college to the workforce and community. These transitions are facilitated through veteran's resource coordinators that provide advocacy, understanding and resource connections for Oregon veterans at community colleges.

Veteran's resource coordinators benefit both the veteran and the community college. In 2012, almost 10,000 Oregon veterans received more than \$120.6 million in Federal VA education benefits. These educational benefits include financial resources in support of attending community colleges, universities, and certification and training programs. A strong veterans program can help attract and retain veterans, resulting in increasing and retaining these federal funds. Veteran's resource coordinators serve as a resource to administration and staff, providing an understanding and appreciation of the strengths of veterans and the veteran's unique challenges and needs.

Veteran's resource coordinators benefit veterans by providing the resources to help the veteran transition into the community college experience, complete their certificate or degree program, and transition into the workforce and community.

The Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD) and the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) have developed a partnership committed to implementing a veteran's resource coordinator program under HB 4023. CCWD will be responsible for implementation and ODVA will serve in an advisory role, providing technical expertise on the needs of veterans.

Analysis of HB 4023

House Bill 4023 was filed by the House Interim Committee on Veterans' Services and Emergency Preparedness. The bill establishes an annual lottery raffle game to benefit veterans' education and economic development. Funds from the raffle are appropriated to the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD).

The bill directs the Department to establish a program to provide opportunities for, or facilitate, the education and training of veterans, the creation of jobs for veterans and economic development opportunities that benefit veterans.

Raffle ticket sales begin on or before July 1, 2015. The estimated annual revenues are \$1.2 million.

Profile of the Oregon Veteran

One in ten Oregonians are veterans. The Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs currently serves four generations of veterans spanning five wars. There are almost 338,000 veterans living in Oregon. Almost 51,000 Oregon veterans, or roughly 15%, are Gulf War Veterans, which includes Gulf War I, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2012, the total Federal VA dollars received by Oregon veterans, their families and survivors was more than \$1.9 billion.

Of the total Federal VA benefits received, \$120.6 million in education program benefits was provided to almost 10,000 Oregon veterans in 2012.

Profile of a Student Veteran

Typical profile of a student veteran:

- Highly motivated to achieve educational goals
- Appreciates the value of the educational experience
- Older and more mature than most first-time students
- Bring leadership, maturity, and life skills that are a basis for success as students
- Often have families

An excerpt from a National Education Association publication article, *Ten Things You Should Know About Today's Student Veteran*, is attached as Exhibit A.

Veteran's Resource Coordinators: The Benefit to Veterans

Resource and Advocate. A Veteran's Resource Coordinator (VRC) serves as a resource and advocate for veterans. The VRC provides guidance and advocacy to connects veterans with resources within the community and the community college. The VRC develops and maintains strong relationships with community college faculty and staff, with community organizations and businesses that provide resources to veterans. In addition, the VRC works closely with county veteran services officers who help the veteran obtain federal veteran benefits and local benefits.

The Veteran's Resource Coordinator acts as a liaison between the student veteran and campus resources to ensure that the issues unique to student veterans are adequately addressed. The coordinator also assesses how the needs of student veterans are being met and identifies new concerns and how the community

college can address them. The VRC works closely with the community college administration, faculty and staff to help them understand and appreciate the unique strengths and challenges veterans face in the community college experience.

A Veteran's Resource Coordinator works closely with the veteran and the Veterans School Certifying Official (SCO) who certifies to the federal VA that a veteran is eligible for educational benefits and is a liaison to federal VA. The VRC also works closely with county veteran service officers for federal VA benefits and other resources.

Three Key Transition Periods. The veteran's resource coordinator helps veterans succeed during three key transition periods:

1. Before admission and onboarding

- Resource guidance, advocacy and understanding
- Resource to veterans considering enrollment for information on benefits, community college resources and procedures, and local resources
- Help veterans utilize benefits to their best advantage
- Help veterans connect with county veterans service officers for federal VA benefits and other resources
- Help veterans successfully transition with the dramatic shifts for from military to civilian and community college life
- Provide a strong connection between the veteran and the community college

2. During the community college experience

- Resource, advocacy and understanding
- Help veterans succeed in college and complete program

- Help veterans connect with other veterans
- Resource and advocacy for benefits, community college and local resources
- Help veterans connect with county veterans service officers
- Help veterans successfully transition to community college life
- Provide a strong connection between the veteran and the community college
- Work with community college faculty and staff on understanding the veteran's unique skills, background and capabilities and the veteran's challenges

3. Transition from community college to workforce and community

- Resource, advocacy and understanding
- Help veterans with workforce and employment resources
- Resource and advocacy for benefits, community college and local resources
- Help veterans connect with county veterans service officers
- Uniquely positioned to help veterans successfully transition to work and community life
- Provide a strong connection between the veteran and the community
- Work with community on understanding the veteran's unique skills, background and capabilities and the veteran's challenges

Veteran's Resource Coordinators: Benefitting Oregon Community Colleges

In 2012, the Federal VA provided more than \$120.6 million in educational benefits to Oregon veterans.

The veteran's resource coordinator can establish a strong relationship between the veteran and the community college even before the veteran enrolls in school. The VRC can help the veteran understand and utilize the educational benefits under the GI Bill to the veteran's best advantage. The VRC can work with the veteran on understanding and following the requirements and procedures of the college. The VRC can connect the veteran to key resources for housing, financial assistance and to other federal benefits through county veterans' service officers.

The community college will benefit from the certainty and stability of federal VA educational benefit dollars. The VRC can help the veteran stay in school by strengthening the connection with community college and community resources, which will ultimately result in increasing the stability of funds.

One of the key goals of community colleges is to focus on outcomes that promote life successes. The VRC can be a key component of this goal by working with community college veterans during the three key transition periods.

Current Veteran's Resource Center and Veteran's Resource Coordinator Models in Oregon Community Colleges

There are 17 community colleges in Oregon, and some currently have robust veterans' programs. All have Veterans School Certifying Official (SCO) who certifies to the federal VA that a veteran is eligible for educational benefits and serves as a liaison to federal VA; however these individuals do not do the work of a veteran's resource coordinator, they work only on the documentation and certification of educational benefits.

Some community colleges have veteran resource centers or Veteran's Resource Coordinators, notably Clackamas Community College, Lane Community College and Portland Community College (see description below).

Clackamas Community College. Several community colleges have “veteran centers,” which are places where veterans can come together and access resources. For example, Clackamas Community College Veterans Center is in the Bill Brod Community Center. *Military Times Edge* named Clackamas Community College as one of the top 100 Veterans Educational Service providers.

Lane Community College. At Lane CC, the Maxwell Student Veteran Center provides a place where Lane student veterans can take a breather, study, get questions answered, or make connections with fellow Lane student veterans. The Center offers computer stations with internet access and a lounge/study area.

Portland Community College (PCC) Veterans Centers. The Rock Creek Veterans Resource Center at PCC is a place to unwind, connect with peers, check out the community bulletin board, and drink free coffee with fellow student veterans. At the Cascade Campus, the Veterans Resource Center creates a safe and friendly space where veterans can talk with other veterans, students and advocates. PCC offers a two-hour advising workshop, where veterans learn how to create an academic plan that helps them get the most out of their veteran's benefits and time at PCC.

Portland Community College Veteran's Resource Coordinator. PCC has a veteran's resource coordinator and is currently recruiting for a position at the Sylvan Campus. The job description is attached as Exhibit B.

CCWD and ODVA: A Unique Partnership to Serve a Unique Need

The vision of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs is that veterans and their families thrive in Oregon. The Department serves and honors veterans through its leadership, advocacy and strong partnerships.

The mission of Community Colleges and Workforce Development is to contribute leadership and resources to increase the skills, knowledge and career opportunities of Oregonians. The focus of Oregon community colleges on the enhancement of student academic progression and completion is the critical piece if Oregon is to achieve the “middle 40” of the 40-40-20 goal. This focus includes an intentional shift from simply ‘access to education’ to a focus on education outcomes that provide access to careers.

Through a shared vision of an Oregon veteran who thrives, CCWD and ODVA have developed a strong partnership to serve the unique needs of the Oregon veteran on a community college campus. CCWD and ODVA are committed to collaborating in the implementation of HB 4023 in order to maximize the benefit to veterans and serve the goals of Oregon community colleges.

CCWD coordinates Oregon’s 17 community colleges. Under HB 4206, Community Colleges and Workforce Development will be responsible for providing the appropriate resources to various community colleges and Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs will work in an advocacy and advisory role to help shape the program.

Exhibit A

Ten Things You Should Know About Today's Student Veteran¹

#1: Student veterans are one of America's greatest untapped human resources.

They are emotionally mature, goal-oriented, mission-driven, experienced leaders. They work tirelessly to achieve their objectives and look for ways to make meaningful contributions. They are self-sufficient; they will only ask questions when they cannot find the answers themselves. They not only understand the concept of sacrifice for the greater good, they've lived it. They are respectful and protective of those around them. They think globally and bypass most things trivial or trendy.

In short, they are the kind of role models we need on our campuses, and graduating to lives of fulfillment in our workplaces. With your support, their academic success can allow them to become some of America's strongest, most insightful leaders. We owe them our gratitude, of course. But more importantly, we owe them a chance to have meaningful new careers and fulfilling civilian lives, from which we will all richly benefit.

¹ Excerpt from: *Ten Things You Should Know About Today's Student Veteran*, by Alison Lighthall. National Education Association Publication, "*Thought and Action*."

Exhibit B: Job description for veteran resource coordinator
Portland Community College
Posted January 8, 2014

1. Coordinate the development of the future Veterans Resource Center at Sylvania.
2. Coordinate and facilitate activities for the future Veterans Resource Center at Sylvania.
3. Develop and implement marketing strategies for services provided by the Center.
4. Collect and evaluate data on Resource Center usage.
5. Develop and implement changes based on changing student needs.
6. Identify current resource materials, both written and computerized materials, for inclusion in the center. Purchase materials as needed and ensure materials are current.
7. Design and facilitate workshops for faculty and staff to increase awareness of veteran student needs and experiences and competencies in addressing these needs.
8. Deliver presentations to classes and external stakeholders, as requested.
9. Assist students in removing barriers to their education.
10. Foster relationships with community and state agencies as well as other college resources. Refer students to available services for further assistance.
11. Facilitate the hire process and supervision of Veterans Resource Center student staff (student leaders, work study students, or other student staff).
12. Help veteran students to transition into the higher education environment.
13. Facilitate student transition into the college environment.