

TO: Bryan Guiney, Oregon House Veterans & Emergency Preparedness Committee
Administrator

FROM: Steven Gordon, US Dept. of Veterans Affairs VetSuccess on Campus Counselor,
Portland Community College

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of HB 2645

DATE: February 2, 2015

Passage of legislation enacting priority enrollment for students receiving VA education and vocational rehabilitation benefits will ensure that qualified veterans and students serving in the armed forces, National Guard and Reserves, and their eligible dependents will be able to take full advantage of the federal education benefits they have earned through their military service. Our veterans deserve the opportunity to get the most from their education benefits so they can fulfill their academic goals and successfully transition to new careers in civilian life. This bill supports these endeavors.

Education benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill are limited to 36 months. In addition, veterans have limited time before their GI Bill or other education and vocational rehabilitation benefits expire. After taking the college placement exam, many veterans are required to take developmental or remedial classes. Thus, months of education benefits can be used before they are able to take prerequisites for their major such as college-level mathematics and writing courses. Furthermore, if a student veteran is unable to enroll in the necessary required courses each term, s/he becomes even more likely to use the entire education benefit entitlement prior to graduating.

Many veterans depend on the GI Bill housing stipend to subsidize living expenses so they can focus on their educational pursuits. As the housing stipend is based on enrollment status, if a student veteran is unable to enroll in only one needed class, his status could change to $\frac{3}{4}$ time, which reduces the housing stipend by 25%. This can create an undue financial burden especially for the veteran with a family. Without priority registration, they may be forced to pay out of pocket for tuition, fees, textbooks, and supplies in order to complete their training programs. Veterans who are already working and supporting families face additional challenges that negatively impact their chances for success. Added financial burden and debt may cause some veterans to abandon their education due to other competing responsibilities.

Priority enrollment/registration is a needed resource. With priority enrollment, student veterans will be assured of being able to enroll in required courses on time, stay on track for graduation, and maximize their VA education benefits.

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