



**DATE:** January 26, 2021  
**TO:** House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management  
**FROM:** Jennifer Donovan, Legislative Director, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs  
**SUBJECT:** HB 2141 – Veterans' Educational Bridge Grant

Chair Evans and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for providing this opportunity to discuss the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs Veterans' Educational Bridge Grant program and supporting legislation.

## **BILL SUMMARY**

HB 2141 extends the sunset of the Veteran Educational Bridge Grant Program from January 2, 2022, to January 2, 2024.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2019 the Legislature passed HB 2201, a measure introduced by the House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness. The purpose of the law is to provide financial assistance, in the form of grants, to veterans who are unable to complete an academic program due to unavailability of required classes.

## **DISCUSSION**

As part of its focus on student veterans, ODVA assists veterans transitioning from military service, to community, to education, to career. Many veterans tap into GI Bill education benefits related to their service, but when there are breaks in availability of courses required to meet their educational goals, veterans also experience a pause in those benefits, including their housing allowance. In the absence of this financial support, veterans must seek alternate means to pay for rent, utilities and other essentials for themselves and their families. Removing themselves from their academic programs and entering the workforce often results in significant delays in returning to education, or not returning at all. This grant was designed to provide support to bridge that pause in benefits to keep veterans on track with their education and career goals.

The program is scheduled to sunset on January 2, 2022. We have seen high demand for this program since its implementation in May 2020. The COVID pandemic has created a situation where many academic programs have been temporarily suspended, particularly apprenticeship programs in which many veterans participate. We are seeking to extend the sunset deadline to ensure the program continues to be available for the duration of the pandemic, and to understand the level of demand once the emergency period of the pandemic ends and academic programs return to normal scheduling.

Veterans are valuable members of our workforce. We ask for your support of HB 2141 so that we may continue to provide our veterans the benefit of education and contribution to a bright future for themselves and Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration, and your continued support of veterans.