

Submitter: Collin Ledford

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce
Development

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3920

Dear Chair Hudson, Vice Chair Harbick, Vice Chair Fragala, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Collin Ledford, and I'm Representative Tran's Legislative Aide – as a resident of NE Portland, I'm also her constituent. I've worked for Rep. Tran since January of 2024.

I am the proud son of a combat veteran. Before I was born, my dad served our country in the Army as part of the 82nd Airborne, as a service member in the Invasion of Panama, and as part of Operation Desert Storm in Kuwait. This experience left him with PTSD, and other injuries, that, over 30 years later, led to a 100% disability rating from the Veterans Administration.

Growing up the son of a disabled veteran wasn't easy. It meant periods where my dad was unable to work, unable to provide for our family. Saving for college is never a possibility for a child when you're struggling to hold a job long enough to make mortgage payments or put food on the table. The trauma and disability my dad has due to his service ultimately led to my parents filing bankruptcy and separating when I was a teenager, wiping out what little my parents had saved to put me and my brother through school.

It was because of the Federal Pell Grant and the Oregon Opportunity Grant that I was able to attend Portland State with only a small amount of student debt, becoming the first in my family to receive a bachelor's degree, ultimately bringing me to the job I hold today. I know how crucial education can be in opening pathways to better opportunities.

It wasn't until December of 2024 when my dad was found to be unemployable due to his disabilities, which raised his disability rating to 100%. This was a truth my family knew for many years, and I have no doubt that if my dad were not disabled from his service, my family would've saved for my undergraduate and future graduate education.

Soon after he was found eligible for this program, I received a certificate of eligibility for Federal Chapter 35 benefits from the VA. I brought this concept to Rep. Tran because I know that were it not for years of processing delays, years of back and forth and misdiagnoses and re-diagnoses, and other barriers, that my dad would've

received his rating years ago. I have Chapter 35 benefits because of the sacrifice my dad made, and the barriers I faced growing up, and being just a year “too old” should not preclude me, or others in my circumstances, from receiving a tuition waiver.

HB 3920 honors disabled veterans and their families and provides educational pathways for children. Age should not be an arbitrary barrier, and students who are eligible for Chapter 35 benefits should be eligible for a tuition waiver for longer to align with the federal changes to the program.

Thank you to the committee for your time.