



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

Oregon State Legislature
State Capitol
Salem, OR

NEWS RELEASE

June 6, 2017

CONTACT: Rick Osborn (503) 986-1074
Rick.osborn@oregonlegislature.gov

Senate removes barriers between National Guard members and the Oregon Promise of affordable community college

HB 3423 exempts National Guard members from 6-month deadline

SALEM – Oregon Senate Democrats believe in keeping the Oregon Promise for all students, and especially those who choose to serve in the Oregon National Guard.

House Bill 3423 – which was carried by Sen. Mark Hass (D-Beaverton) to passage on the Senate floor by a 30-0 vote – exempts Oregon National Guard members who have completed their initial active duty training from the Oregon Promise requirement to enroll in community college courses within 6 months of graduating from high school or getting their GED.

“Those who choose to serve in the military should be revered and applauded; not penalized,” said Hass, who engineered the Oregon Promise program. “This allows those who enlist in the Oregon National Guard an opportunity to benefit from the promise we have made to all of Oregon’s young students, that we will help them get the job training and education they need to get good jobs right here in Oregon.”

Initial active duty training typically takes Oregon National Guard members between 3 and 12 months to complete, and military regulations require that the training is completed within 24 months. Although some members are recruited as high school students and complete their basic training between their junior and senior years, many individuals’ training schedules make it impossible for them to begin attending community college within 6 months of graduation. Under current law, this makes them ineligible for the Oregon Promise grant program.

The Oregon Promise – which was passed in the 2015 Legislative Session – provides tuition waivers for Oregon high school graduates who meet eligibility requirements and accept all federal and state grants for which they qualify. The state then picks up most of the rest of the cost for those students to attend a community college to begin their bachelor’s degrees or get the job training – through associate degrees or certifications – they need to pursue their chosen careers. Participating students must achieve a minimum high school grade-point average of 2.5 and meet certain academic requirements to remain enrolled in the program. Oregon is one of two states that offers this type of assistance to its students.

In the first year of the program, more than 19,000 students applied and 10,000 waivers were awarded to students attending Oregon’s 17 community colleges. Enrollments at community colleges statewide rose because of the program, as students began realizing their ability to get valuable job training to pursue good-paying careers or earn credits they can transfer toward a bachelor’s degree at a university without racking up mind-boggling student loan debt.

The Oregon National Guard – which consists of the Oregon Army National Guard and Oregon Air National Guard – is charged with supporting Oregon’s governor during unrest and natural disaster. It’s also a reserve force for the United States Army and United States Air Force.

“These students are sacrificing their time and potentially their lives, should they be called to active duty during a conflict, and we should be keeping our promise to those students,” Hass said. “Whether they want to become a doctor, college professor, dental hygienist or welder, we should be supporting young Oregonians’ dreams to pursue those careers. It’s unfair for students to become ineligible for the Oregon Promise because they are choosing to serve their country, and this bill fixes that.”

HB 3423 now goes to Gov. Kate Brown for signature.

###