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CONTACT:

Molly Woon (503) 986-1074

Molly.woon@state.or.us

Tuition waivers for orphans, widows of veterans finds support in Senate

SB 595 expands on 2008 program to expand access to Oregon's public universities

SALEM – Legislation to expand the pool of persons qualified for tuition waivers at Oregon's public universities passed the Senate this morning. Senate Bill 595 will allow survivors of servicemen and servicewomen killed or 100 percent disabled in combat to apply for open seats in courses at Oregon's seven public universities and Oregon Health and Sciences University.

"This is a small thing we can do to honor the sacrifice of families of Oregon veterans," said Sen. Mark Hass (D-Beaverton), chair of the Senate Education and General Government Committee. "We began this commitment in 2008 and I'm proud to see us expand this program."

SB 595 is an expansion of legislation passed in 2008, both bills sponsored by Hass. Senate Bill 1066 from the 2008 session offered waivers for unfilled course seats to allow children and spouses of service members who were killed or 100 percent disabled after September 11, 2001. Senate Bill 595 expands the benefit to survivors of all deceased or permanently disabled veterans, regardless of when they were injured or killed.

"Providing educational opportunities for our veterans and their dependents is a value of the Senate Democrats," said Senate Majority Leader Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin). "We made our first steps in this direction during the 2008 session. Today's legislation is a significant expansion that demonstrates our commitment to the men and women who have served us and those they leave behind."

SB 595 comes at a minimal cost to the state because it takes advantage of open classroom seats. Qualified students are able to enroll in open classroom seats without being charged for the cost of those credit hours.

The bill will now go to the House for consideration.

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