

Date of Hearing: April 19, 2016

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
Jose Medina, Chair  
AB 2494 (Roger Hernández) – As Introduced February 19, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Veteran Resource Centers Grant Program.

**SUMMARY:** Establishes the Veteran Resource Centers Grant (VRCG) Program and the VRCG Fund housed in the State Treasury. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Finds and declares the following intent of the Legislature:
  - a) More than 60,000 veterans and active duty service members were enrolled at campuses of the California Community Colleges (CCC) in the 2013–14 academic year;
  - b) Education is a tool for community college students to achieve economic success;
  - c) Veterans face unique challenges in achieving professional success, including posttraumatic-stress disorder and assimilation to civilian life during and after serving on active duty; and,
  - d) The intent of the VRCG Program is to help veterans and active duty service members enrolled at CCC campuses achieve academic and professional success.
- 2) Specifies that the CCC Chancellor shall do all of the following:
  - a) Administer the VRCG Program and distribute awards to recipient CCDs and CCCs; and,
  - b) Develop application criteria, administrative guidelines, and other requirements, by May 26, 2017, through a stakeholder process and public meetings, for purposes of administering the program. Specifies that said requirements may include the CCC Chancellor awarding funding priority to CCD and campus applicants that commit to contributing an amount of funds in addition to the grant to develop, enhance, or maintain a veteran resource center at a CCC campus.
- 3) Authorizes the governing board of a community college district and a CCC campus at which a veterans resource center has been or is intended to be established, to jointly apply to the CCC Chancellor for a grant for purposes of providing resources to veterans and active duty members of the Armed Forces of the United States enrolled at the campus.
- 4) Establishes the VRCG Fund in the State Treasury.
- 5) Allocates monies in the fund, upon appropriation by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act, to the CCC Chancellor for, among others, administration of the program and distribution of awards to recipient community college districts and campuses.
- 6) Requires the CCC Chancellor to submit a report to the Legislature on the progress of the program on or before May 31, 2019.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Requires the California State University (CSU) and the CCC and encourages the University of California (UC) to coordinate services for qualified students who are veterans or members of the military by clearly designating Military and Veterans Offices and individuals to provide specified services to qualified students. Current law defines "qualified student" as a student who is any of the following: an active duty member of the Armed Forces of the United States, the California National Guard, a reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States, a veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States, and/or a family member of a person (as described above) who is a legal dependent under 28 years of age or living in the household of that person and eligible to be claimed as a dependent on federal or state tax returns (Education Code (EC) Section 69785).
- 2) Requests the UC, CSU, the CCC to report annually to the California Department of Veterans Affairs the number of qualified students assisted by a Military and Veterans Office; the number of qualified students assisted who are active duty members of the Armed Forces of the United States, the California National Guard, or a reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States, or are veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States; and the total education benefits by all qualified students assisted by an office (EC Section 69786).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *Double referral.* This measure passed out of the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee on March 29, 2016, with a vote of 8-0.

*Background.* According to a recent survey by the National Center for Veterans Studies at the University of Utah, veteran students are six times more likely to attempt suicide than the general student population. Nearly 50 percent of the 525 veteran students surveyed reported having had suicidal thoughts some time in their lives. Twenty percent of these veteran students said they had suicidal thoughts with a plan; this is a rate three times higher than general college students who seriously considered suicide. Experts in this field agree that suicidal thinking with a plan is considered a very severe suicidal risk. The majority of individuals with serious suicide risks deal with PTSD symptoms such as: significant anxiety, intrusive thoughts, sleep disturbances, and recurrent images from combat.

*Outreach to current student veterans.* The CCCs are providing more services to a growing population of student veterans; the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) recognizes the need for continued support of our student veterans and as such has been the lead on several statewide projects, including, but not limited to, the Veterans Resource Center Project: At VRCs, student veterans can interact with one another and obtain information and services. As a result, at least 24 additional colleges have established a VRC on their campus.

To note, because the individual campuses do not have to report to the CCCCCO as to if they have a VRC, it is presently unknown the exact number of campuses that have VRCs, however, it is estimated that at least half of the CCCs have a VRC. Additionally, VRCs are staffed by either full-time employees or a mix of volunteers and student mentors.

*Purpose of this measure.* According to the author, "Current law is silent regarding VRCs. The recent proliferation of VRCS is largely based on philanthropic efforts by public and private donors, as well as partnerships with local business." The author contends that this measure, "demonstrates a

commitment by the state to work with charitable groups and build VRCs to provide veterans with necessary academic tools to succeed."

*Policy consideration.* As presently drafted, it is unclear as to how the VRCG Program will be funded. *Moving forward, the author may wish to work with the Legislative Budget Committees in order to ensure adequate funding is available and appropriated for purposes of the CCC Chancellor being able to implement the provisions described in this measure.*

*Previous legislation.* AB 393 (Roger Hernández), of 2015, which was held on the Suspense File in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, is similar in nature to this measure.

AB 421 (Calderon), of 2015, which was held on the Suspense File in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, would, among others, require the governing board of a community college district to provide in each CCC within the district, a veterans counselor.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

North Orange County Community College District

**Opposition**

None on file.

**Analysis Prepared by:** Jeanice Warden / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960