

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2015

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
Jose Medina, Chair  
AB 393 (Roger Hernández) – As Amended March 23, 2015

**[Note: This bill is doubled referred to the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee and will be heard as it relates to issues under its jurisdiction.]**

**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) Creates the VRCG Program and Fund.
- 2) States the Legislature finds and declares all of the following: a) more than 60,000 veterans and active duty service members 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 (PTSD) and assimilation to civilian life during and after serving on active duty; and, the intent of the VRCG Program is to help veterans and active duty service members enrolled at campuses of the CCC achieve academic and professional success.
- 3) Specifies the VRCG Fund is established in the State Treasury; and, that monies in the Fund, upon appropriation by the Legislature in the annual Budget Act, shall be allocated to the CCC Chancellor for the implementation and administration of the VRCG Program.
- 4) Authorizes a governing board of a community college district (CCD) 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 the veterans and active duty members of the Armed Forces of the United States enrolled at the campus to help them succeed academically.
- 5) 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, 2016, 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.
- 6) Requires the CCC Board of Governors (BOG) to submit a progress report of the VRCG Program to the Legislature on or before May 31, 2018.

- 7) Specifies that the reporting requirements, as specified, will become inoperative on June 1, 2022; and, shall comply with current law reporting requirements.

**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 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:** *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.

According to the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Center), in 2012, nationwide over 660,000 undergraduate students were veterans, constituting about 3 percent of all undergraduates. Additionally, in 2013, approximately 215,000 undergraduate students were military service members on active duty or in the reserves, constituting about 1 percent of all undergraduates. Increasing numbers of military service members are using Government Issued (GI) education benefits for postsecondary education. The Center reports that approximately 40 percent of military service members used their veteran education benefits in 2007-2008.

According to the CCC Chancellor's Office, in 2013-14, veterans and active duty military personnel comprised over 60,000 of the over 2.1 million students attending CCCs.

*Purpose of the measure.* According to the author, "Based on our research, current law is silent regarding VRCs [Veterans Resource Centers]. The recent proliferation of VRCs is largely based on philanthropic efforts by public and private donors." The author contends that, "AB 393

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

*Joint hearing on student veteran issues.* To prepare for the influx of veterans, on February 28, 2012, the Assembly Higher Education and Assembly Veterans Affairs Committees held a joint oversight hearing on the challenges facing California student veterans. Several students and representatives from the higher education institutions spoke for the need for more resources for veterans' services, including more transition assistance, improving outreach and campus-based programs, and easing the matriculation of prior military learning.

*Current student veterans outreach.* The CCCs are providing more services to a growing population of student veterans; the CCCCCO 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, 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.

*Related legislation.* AB 421 (Calderon), which will be heard by this Committee today, would, among other things, require the governing board of a CCC to provide each college within the district a veterans counselor.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

AMVETS, Department of California  
California Association of County Veterans Service Officers  
Community College League of California  
Citrus Community College  
Military Officers Association of America, California Council of Chapters  
Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of California  
Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council  
23 individuals

### **Opposition**

None on file.

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