

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2013

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Das Williams, Chair
AB 409 (Quirk-Silva) – As Amended: April 2, 2013

SUBJECT: Student veterans: services.

SUMMARY: Requires the California State University (CSU) and the California Community Colleges (CCC) to convene a task force to evaluate and report to the Governor and the Legislature how best to serve the transitional needs of postsecondary student veterans, as specified, and encourages the University of California (UC) to participate in the task force. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the CSU and the CCC, on or before June 30, 2014, to convene a task force in order to develop a report for the Governor and the Legislature relating to student veterans' transition to postsecondary education and encourages the UC to participate.
- 2) Specifies that the task force shall address specific issues related to student veterans' transition to postsecondary education, including, but not limited to, all of the following:
 - a) Reviewing the best practices for meeting the needs of student veterans and ensuring that all campuses offer veterans' counseling services;
 - b) Evaluating how the campuses of the UC, CSU, and the CCC currently assist student veterans in understanding the effects of postwar stress, posttraumatic stress disorder, and traumatic brain injuries;
 - c) Evaluating the existing resources offered by the segments for veterans and ways to ensure that veterans are aware of the resources; and,
 - d) Assessing whether additional services for veterans are needed, such an online course addressing postwar effects on veterans.
- 3) Specifies the final report of the task force shall be completed and distributed to the Governor and the Legislature on or before January 10, 2015.
- 4) Requires CCC districts to be reimbursed for costs if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires the CSU and the CCC and encourages the 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] § 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 § 69786).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: This bill is double-referred to the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee.

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% 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 posttraumatic stress symptoms such as: significant anxiety, intrusive thoughts, sleep disturbances, and recurrent images from combat.

According to the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Center), last year, nationwide over 660,000 undergraduate students were veterans, constituting about 3% of all undergraduates. Additionally, last year, approximately 215,000 undergraduate students were military service members on active duty or in the reserves, constituting about 1% 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% of military service members used their veteran education benefits in 2007-2008.

Need for the bill. According to the author's office, the CSU and the CCC have on-campus Veterans' Centers that provide assistance to prospective and enrolled veteran students on accessing their state and federal educational and GI benefits (housing, tuition, books, etc.), as well as completing the admission application process. Additionally, student veterans receive aid on the evaluation of their military transcripts. The author contends that some institutions offer additional services to help students on the transition back to school or students who are entering college for the first time, but that it appears as if some of the campuses could improve on offering specific services to student veterans.

The author believes this measure is a step in the right direction in continuing to ensure that all veteran students have their specific needs met as they endeavor to earn a postsecondary education.

Segment Policies.

- 1) The UC total enrollment of veteran students was 958 in 2011-2012. Even though they have a relatively small population of veteran students, individual campuses have and continue to

develop programs and practices such as special orientations, priority campus housing, and mental health counseling services for veterans students.

- 2) The CSU enrolled 11,577 student veterans (including 6,250 active duty and 5,327 dependents) in the fall of 2010, representing 2.8% of the CSU student body. The CSU Student Veteran Research Project in the spring of 2011, reviewed the 23 campuses veteran services offerings and released several recommendations aimed at increasing access and success among veteran students. The recommendations included employing at least one full-time point person on a campus to coordinate veterans' services, identifying key data points and tracking data to evaluate success, strategies, and policies, and providing student leadership opportunities and designated multipurpose space for veteran students.
- 3) The CCC serves the majority of veteran students in California and according to the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), in 2009-2010 academic year, 36,896 veterans utilized education benefits at a CCC, a 40.8% growth since 2008-09. While the level of support for veterans varies throughout the CCC system, the number of veteran students attending has led the CCCCCO and many individual districts to look to expand support services for this growing population.

The CCCCCO has also (1) organized a regional representation structure and hosts regular meetings to identify student veteran needs and share innovative ideas across the system, (2) established a systemwide email list to communicate strategies relating to veterans services to the 112 campuses, and (3) redesigned its veterans' web page to better support colleges. Additionally, the CCCCCO is engaged in several projects to expand services to veterans.

Previous legislation. SB 1375 (Alquist) of 2012, which died in the Senate Education Committee, encouraged the CCC, the CSU and the UC to offer on-campus counseling services for student veterans by utilizing the resources of existing campus military and veterans offices.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Legion – Department of California
AMVETS – Department of California
California Association of County Veterans Service Officers
California State Commanders Veterans Council
National Association of Social Workers – California Chapter
VFW – Department of California
Vietnam Veterans of America – California State Council

Opposition

None on file.