

Date of Hearing: June 9, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

SB 892 (Grove) – As Amended February 23, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 36-0

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary education: priority registration: members and former members of the Armed Forces of the United States and State Guard

SUMMARY: Eliminates, commencing July 1, 2027, the current time-based limitations on priority enrollment for current and former members of the United States Armed Forces and the State Guard. As a result, the California State University (CSU) and community college districts (CCD) would continue to be required, and the University of California (UC) would continue to be requested, to grant priority registration without regard to the timing or duration limits. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Sunsets the existing veteran priority registration provisions on July 1, 2027, and repeals those statutes on January 1, 2028.
- 2) Removes the requirement that veterans use the priority registration benefit within 15 years of separating from service.
- 3) Eliminates the current limitation restricting the use of the benefits to four academic years.
- 4) Includes the California Naval Militia and the California State Guard in the definition of Armed Forces.
- 5) Takes effect on July 1, 2027.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Community Colleges (CCC), the CSU, and the UC as the three segments of public institutions of higher education in the state. (Education Code (EDC) Section 66010)
- 2) Requires the CSU and each community college district, and requests the UC, to grant priority registration for enrollment to a member or former member of the US Armed Forces who is a resident of California and who has received an honorable discharge, a general discharge, or an other than honorable discharge, and to any member or former member of the State Guard, as specified, for any academic term attended at one of these institutions for 4 academic years after leaving state or federal active duty for use within 15 years of leaving state or federal active duty. (EDC Section 66025.8)
- 3) Authorizes the CSU and each CCD, and requests the UC to offer priority registration to foster youth, former foster youth, homeless youth, or formerly homeless youth, as defined. (EDC Section 66025.9)

- 4) Requires each CCD to offer priority registration to students eligible for disabled student programs and services, students eligible for extended opportunity programs and services, students receiving CalWORKS, and students who receive Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as defined. (EDC Section 66025.91 and 66025.92)
- 5) Requires each campus of the CSU, and each campus within a CCD, and requests each campus of the UC to offer priority registration to student parents. (EDC Section 66025.81)
- 6) Requires CCDs and the CSU and requests the UC to grant priority registration to students employed as first responders. (EDC Section 66025.82)
- 7) Provides that statutes related to UC (and most other aspects of the governance and operation of UC) are applicable only to the extent that the Regents of UC make such provisions applicable. (EDC Sections 67400 and 68134)
- 8) Establishes the California Military Department GI Bill Award Program for persons who are active members of the California National Guard, the State Guard, or the Naval Militia to use toward obtaining a certificate, degree, or diploma. In order to qualify for an award, current law requires that the member agree to serve at least two years upon completion of the last academic period that the person uses educational assistance under the program and is required to complete their course of study within 10 years of initial acceptance into the program. Existing law also establishes the eligibility criteria for an award and specifies the qualifying institutions for which the award may be used. (EDC Section 69999.16)
- 9) Establishes various educational benefits for dependents of veterans who were killed during military service or are totally disabled, as specified; defines “dependent of a veteran” to include the spouse of a totally disabled veteran; and prohibits a dependent of a veteran from receiving these educational benefits during the time the dependent is entitled to receive specified federal educational benefits or duplicative assistance from any other government source. (Military and Veterans Code (MVC) Section 890, et seq.)
- 10) Provides, under federal law, that veterans and certain dependents are eligible for education benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017 (Forever GI Bill) eliminated the 15-year time limitation for veterans discharged from active duty on or after January 1, 2013 allowing eligible individuals to use Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits without a time limit. (Public Law 115-48, 38 U.S.C Section 3321, et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: Pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, the Senate Committee on Appropriations found that any additional state costs are not significant and do not and will not require the appropriation of additional state funds, and the bill will cause no significant reduction in revenues.

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* According to the author, “...veterans and State Guard members have earned every opportunity to succeed when they return to civilian life. Many do not have the ability to enroll in college immediately after their service because they are working, raising families, or addressing health needs. They should not lose access to priority registration simply because life required them to wait. SB 892 ensures that priority registration is available whenever a veteran is ready to pursue higher education. By aligning California policy with the

Federal Forever GI Bill, this measure guarantees that those who served our country can access the classes they need on a timeline that works for them.”

Federal GI Bill history. Education benefits for veterans in the United States began taking shape in the early 20th century. Recognizing that military service often interrupted educational opportunities, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act of 1919, which provided financial assistance to World War I veterans with service-related disabilities. During World War II, additional support emerged through the 1940 Selective Training and Service Act, which ensured job reinstatement and offered training and rehabilitation services for disabled veterans.

A major turning point came in 1944 with two key laws. The Veterans Act granted veterans preference in federal hiring, but the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act—better known as the GI Bill—had the most lasting impact. It provided unemployment benefits, educational assistance, and low-interest loans for homes, farms, and businesses. This legislation became the foundation for all future veterans’ benefits programs, with later versions expanding access to education and training, including provisions for spouses and dependents of disabled or deceased veterans.

In the decades that followed, veterans’ education programs continued to evolve. Laws in 1966 and 1976 expanded benefits and introduced new structures, including requiring service members to contribute financially. In 1984, the Montgomery GI Bill was established, requiring active-duty personnel to contribute part of their pay during their first year of service. Made permanent in 1987, this program aimed to support veterans’ transition to civilian life while also encouraging military recruitment and retention, offering additional incentives such as supplemental benefits for specialized skills.

Post 9/11 GI Bill and Forever GI Bill. The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides education benefits to individuals who have served at least 90 days of active duty on or after September 10, 2001, with coverage for training pursued since August 1, 2009. These benefits are not limited to veterans alone—they are also available to active service members and, in many cases, can be extended to their families, making them a significant resource for long-term educational and career advancement. Eligibility for full or partial benefits depends on length of service, with those serving less than 36 months receiving a percentage of the total benefit.

The Forever GI Bill, as noted in *Existing Law*, builds on this foundation by enhancing existing education programs rather than creating a new one. It was designed to address gaps in the original Post-9/11 GI Bill and improve access and flexibility for service members, veterans, and their families. Specifically, the Forever GI Bill eliminated the 15-year time limitation for veterans discharged from active duty on or after January 1, 2013 allowing eligible individuals to use Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits without a time limit.

Priority registration. Priority registration decisions are made at the campus level at each segment. The process allows specific students access to classes ahead of the general student population. For example, continuing students generally are allowed to enroll in courses before new students enroll. As such, students who have priority registration status have an advantage over other students.

In addition to priority registration granted by the campuses, existing law requires the CSU and/or CCCs, and requests the UC to grant priority enrollment to the following students:

- 1) CSU California Promise students (CSU).
- 2) Current and former foster youth (CSU, CCCs and UC).
- 3) Homeless youth (CSU, CCCs and UC).
- 4) A member or former member of the US Armed Forces who is a resident of California and who has received an honorable discharge, a general discharge, or an other than honorable discharge, and to any member or former member of the State Guard, as specified, for any academic term attended at one of these institutions for four academic years after leaving state or federal active duty for use within 15 years of leaving state or federal active duty.
- 5) Any student who is a CalWORKs or Tribal TANF recipient (CCCs).
- 6) Students in the Community College Extended Opportunity Programs and Services program, and disabled students who are determined to be eligible for disabled student programs and services (CCCs).

Committee staff notes that SB 892 (Grove) includes former and current members of the California Naval Militia and the California State Guard to the definition of US Armed Forces for purposes of granting priority registration. This change is consistent with existing current law, and is largely technical in nature.

Eliminates the 4-year duration of priority registration eligibility. In addition to removing the 15-year timeline for when veterans may receive priority registration, this bill eliminates the 4-year rule limiting how long veterans may use the benefit. *Committee staff notes* that existing state law grants priority registration to several student groups, none of which are subject to time limitations. In that respect, the change proposed in this bill appears to align veterans' eligibility with those provisions.

Arguments in support. A coalition of Veterans Service Organizations wrote in support, stating that "SB 892 aligns California with the federal Forever GI Bill by removing both the four-year and 15-year restrictions on priority registration. Many veterans do not enroll in higher education immediately upon leaving service. They may be working, raising families, or addressing health needs related to their service. A veteran who decides to pursue a degree a decade after discharge should not lose access to priority registration simply because life required them to wait. Every other student group that receives priority registration in California -- foster youth, homeless youth, CalWORKs recipients, student parents, and first responders -- faces no such time limitation. Priority registration does not guarantee a seat in a class. It ensures that veterans can enroll in the courses they need to stay on track toward a degree or certificate. For veterans relying on time-limited GI Bill benefits, being shut out of required courses can delay graduation, exhaust benefits early, and increase out-of-pocket costs."

The CSU Office of the Chancellor also wrote in support, arguing that "...by allowing eligible student veterans to access priority registration at any point in their educational journey, the bill expands opportunities for veterans to begin or return to their studies at the CSU without being constrained by a deadline. Additionally, this measure aligns with the CSU's longstanding commitment to supporting veterans and military families and strengthens our public higher education system's dedication to equity, access and student success. The CSU, and its 22

universities, remain committed to working with our veterans to provide the educational opportunities they desire.”

Current legislation. AB 2203 (Tangipa, 2026) requires, commencing with the 2028–29 academic year, the California State University (CSU) and each community college district (CCD), and would request the University of California (UC), to grant priority registration for enrollment to students who receives a fee waiver, as specified, and students who are using any federal GI Bill benefits. AB 2203 (Tangipa) is set to be heard by the Senate Committee on Education on June 10, 2026.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Legion-Department of California
AMVETS-Department of California
California State Commanders Veterans Council
California State University, Office of the Chancellor
City of Bakersfield
County of Kern
Fresno County Board of Supervisors
Student Senate for California Community Colleges
Military Officers Association of America-California Council of Chapters
Vietnam Veterans of America-California State Council

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Kevin J. Powers / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960