

Proposed Bill Position

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES LEGISLATIVE BILL ANALYSIS

Bill Number: H.R. 6322- Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act Of 2020

Bill Author: Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA)

Bill Status: On Tuesday, March 31, 2020, the Act was passed by the House without objection. It is expected that the Senate will vote on the bill upon its return from recess in May 2020.

Bill Summary: This bill would allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to continue work-study payments and monthly housing allowances to eligible veteran students during emergency situations in which a college or program has either closed or suspended operations. The bill would also ensure that the duration of an emergency situation does not count towards the eligibility time limit for GI Bill educational benefits.

Bill Detail:

Specifically, this bill:

- Until December 21, 2020, allows the VA to continue work-study payments during emergencies in which student veterans are unable to perform the duties of their work.
 - Allows the VA to determine the amount of work-study allowance payable to the student veteran but payments may not exceed the amount normally payable.
- Until December 21, 2020, provides that the VA may pay monthly housing allowances to eligible student veterans if they are enrolled in a course or program that is closed for an emergency situation or is suspended for reason of an emergency situation.
 - Payment of allowances during the covered emergency period shall not exceed four weeks.
 - Allowance payments during the emergency covered period shall not count towards the existing four week emergency allowance cap authorized by law.
- Excludes the time during an emergency for which a student is prevented from pursuing a program from the ten year eligibility limit under the Montgomery GI Bill educational benefit rules.
- Excludes the time during an emergency for which a student is prevented from pursuing a program from the 15-year eligibility limit under the 9/11 GI Bill educational benefit rules.
- Provides a time extension for transfer of unused 9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to family members for a period equal to the number of months that the individual was prevented from pursuing a program as a result of an emergency.

- Extends school closure protections to vocational rehabilitation and employment students to ensure their benefits are protected during emergencies.

Fiscal Impact:

There are no projected costs to the Chancellor's Office or to campuses as a result of the passage of this bill. It is currently unknown how many student veterans attending California Community Colleges would be impacted; although Chancellor's Office staff are attempting to gather data on the student impact of the bill, veteran work-study enrollment is not currently collected at the system level.

Discussion:

This bill would allow the VA to continue work-study payments during an emergency situation in which an eligible student can no longer perform the duties of their work, until December 21, 2020. This will ensure veteran students do not lose out on crucial income to help meet their basic needs. Further, while existing law allows the VA to continue disbursement of monthly housing allowances for a period of up to four weeks due to school closures related to natural disasters, HR 6322 would build upon these protections to include all public health emergencies, including the COVID-19 Pandemic. This bill would also allow four weeks of monthly housing allowances during a school or program closure without counting towards the four week cap currently authorized by law.

HR 6322 would extend educational benefits under the GI Bill for student veterans and dependents by the length of time a school or program is closed or suspended and would also provide entitlement protections for those enrolled in vocational programs that cannot transition into online instruction. The bill, however, does not appear to include "backfill" protections for student veterans using GI Bill education benefits that were already disbursed prior to an emergency situation. For example, a student veteran who used a portion of their 36 month 9/11 GI Bill education benefits prior to the closure or suspension of a program would not be returned that used benefit under the terms of the bill. Instead, any period *after* a closure or suspension during which a program would normally be in operation would not be counted against the veteran's 36 month limit. Student veterans, therefore, are not penalized for programs or courses they cannot complete because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, they would not receive restoration of educational benefits that were used prior to a school or program closure.

Recommended Chancellor's Office Position:

Support. This bill ensures that veterans will continue to receive work-study benefits and subsistence allowances which are critical to meeting basic needs during the duration of college campus closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Absent the passage of this bill, veteran students are in danger of experiencing financial hardship that may jeopardize program participation and overall academic success.