

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE

FOR

H. B. 2490

(BY DELEGATE(S) IAQUINTA, FLEISCHAUER, LONGSTRETH,
STEPHENS AND AZINGER)

(Originating in the Committee on Education.)

[March 28, 2013]

A BILL to amend and reenact §18B-4-9 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to providing services for and addressing needs of student veterans enrolled in state institutions of higher education; designating role and duties of veterans advocates; and specifying certain provisions to be implemented for student veterans.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

That §18B-4-9 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, be amended and reenacted to read as follows:

ARTICLE 4. GENERAL ADMINISTRATION.

§18B-4-9. Development of services and facilities for student veterans.

1 (a) *Legislative findings.* — The Legislature finds that
2 veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States that attend
3 institutions of higher education in this state have many unique
4 needs, issues and concerns that most traditional students do not
5 have. ~~Student veterans that are returning to fulfill their needs for
6 higher education who have been or during their pursuit of higher
7 education may be deployed to active duty often face unique
8 issues and concerns that are unprecedented and unique to the
9 current generation of veterans of the post 9/11 era of service in
10 the Armed Forces. Many of these veterans have had or will be
11 subject to multiple deployments to active duty, including
12 overseas deployment, resulting in many unique issues and
13 challenges in to their pursuit of higher education.~~

14 (b) *Legislative intent.* — It is the intent of the Legislature
15 that state institutions of higher education provide adequate
16 services and facilities for student veterans in order to better serve
17 their unique ~~issues and~~ needs and to make West Virginia's state
18 institutions of higher education veteran-friendly.

19 (c) The commission, ~~and council~~ and each state institution
20 of higher education shall establish and implement measures ~~in~~
21 ~~the state institutions of higher education under their respective~~
22 ~~jurisdictions~~ to assure that veterans enrolled in the institutions
23 receive services and are provided facilities appropriate for their
24 ~~unique~~ needs, that student veterans complete programs of study
25 and earn degrees, and that the institutions become
26 veteran-friendly by actively and effectively providing academic
27 and social support and assistance to student veterans. The
28 measures shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

29 (1) Establishing veteran-friendly community and technical
30 college degree programs which recognize and award academic
31 credit toward degrees for various types of technical and voca-
32 tional military training and experience;

33 (2) Developing policies for each state ~~institutions~~ institution
34 of higher education to grant academic credit for Armed Forces
35 experiences;

36 (3) Developing programs to ~~facilitate~~ encourage student
37 veterans ~~in sharing their unique knowledge and experience in the~~
38 ~~military through~~ to share their specialized experience and

39 knowledge gained through military service by making presenta-
40 tions in class, public school programs and local community
41 organizations;

42 (4) Establishing and sponsoring an organization for student
43 veterans on campus and encouraging other veteran-friendly
44 organizations;

45 (5) Appointing and training specific faculty within each
46 degree program or major as liaisons and contacts for student
47 veterans;

48 (6) Providing information about ~~the Regents Bachelor of~~
49 ~~Arts Degree program~~ programs that grant credit for prior
50 learning to student veterans and potential student veterans;

51 (7) Coordinating existing disability services on campus with
52 veteran disability services available from the United States
53 Department of Veterans Affairs, other federal and state agencies,
54 and private resources;

55 (8) Designating individuals to provide financial and psycho-
56 logical counseling services ~~Providing counselors~~ on each campus
57 who are trained to effectively respond to the ~~unique~~ needs of
58 veterans and to provide services or ~~provide~~ referrals to services

59 to fulfill these needs for student veterans~~;~~, and to the extent
60 practicable, providing those services and programs in one
61 location;

62 (9) Developing training materials on responding to student
63 veteran needs to be available for continued professional develop-
64 ment of counselors to student veterans;

65 (10) Facilitating regular statewide meetings for all personnel
66 at state institutions of higher education who regularly provide
67 specific services to student veterans to discuss and develop best
68 practices, exchange ideas and experiences, and hear presenta-
69 tions by individuals with generally accepted expertise in areas of
70 the various needs of student veterans;

71 ~~(11) Establishing a procedure to periodically apprise~~
72 ~~appropriate state and federal agencies of the status of student~~
73 ~~veterans in West Virginia~~ Gathering data on the status of student
74 veterans, including their graduation rates, comparing that rate
75 with the graduation rate of other students in the institution, and
76 reporting those results to appropriate state and federal agencies,
77 including the West Virginia Legislature;

78 (12) Establishing a program to create a collaborative
79 relationship between student veterans and alumni of the institu-

80 tion, and with prospective employers to facilitate and provide
81 employment as well as social opportunities to graduating student
82 veterans; ~~and~~

83 (13) Developing and facilitating communications between
84 state institutions of higher education and various veteran
85 organizations in the state to advance veteran causes that benefit
86 student veterans; and

87 (14) Coordinating among all relevant departments within
88 each state institution of higher education including but not
89 limited to admissions, the registrar, the bursar, the veterans
90 advocate and financial aid to ensure that relevant deadlines or
91 time-lines are met for certifying veterans' enrollment as early as
92 practicable to ensure that assistance is received from the U.S.
93 Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) in a timely fashion.
94 Measures to achieve greater coordination may include but are
95 not limited to:

96 (A) Identifying applicants who are veterans as early as
97 possible;

98 (B) Taking affirmative steps to reach out to veteran appli-
99 cants to inform them of relevant policies, time-lines or deadlines
100 for receiving veterans assistance;

101 (C) Developing a communications plan between depart-
102 ments, applicants and students to ensure that deadlines or time-
103 lines are being met;

104 (D) Developing plans to assist students when U.S. Depart-
105 ment of Veterans Affairs benefits are not received in a timely
106 fashion. Such plans could include forbearance of payment
107 deadlines, short-term loans, grants, or a revolving fund.

108 (E) Making every effort to provide sufficient class sections
109 to meet the needs of students for classes which are required for
110 graduation, including where appropriate, giving student veterans
111 priority registration.

112 (d) *Veterans Advocates.* — Each state institution of higher
113 education shall appoint or designate and train a person, prefera-
114 bly a veteran, to serve as a veterans advocate on its campus. The
115 commission and council shall also provide training for veterans
116 advocates at each of the institutions under their respective
117 jurisdictions. The veterans advocate shall serve as the primary
118 point of contact and campus advocate for current and prospective
119 students who are veterans of the Armed Forces of the United
120 States or are current members of the Armed Forces of the United

121 States, including reserve components of the National Guard of
122 this state or any other state. The duties and responsibilities of the
123 veterans advocate include, but are not limited to the following:

124 (1) Assist and facilitate student veterans in utilizing services,
125 resources and facilities available at the institution; and

126 (2) To the extent resources are available for such purposes,
127 provide services, programs and assistance to current and
128 prospective student veterans designed to encourage, promote and
129 facilitate the recruitment, retention and academic success of such
130 students.

131 ~~(d)~~ (e) The commission and council jointly shall submit a
132 report to the Legislature on September 1, annually, on the
133 progress toward implementing ~~the provisions of~~ this section.