



Senate Education Committee

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HOUSE BILL 131-REPRESENTATIVE BARRAR

SYNOPSIS:

Provides that public institutions of higher education must charge the resident tuition rate to military personnel and their dependents to bring Pennsylvania into compliance with federal law, which incentivizes, but does not require, this benefit.

SUMMARY:

Provides that veterans, their spouses and dependent children attending a state-related or state-owned institution of higher learning are charged in-state tuition, as long as they are a resident on the first day of the term. If they attend a community college, they are charged the local sponsor rate. If they take online courses, the resident tuition rate shall be charged. The tuition benefit applies to those who qualify for benefits under the post-9/11 GI bill.

The benefit will apply to:

- veterans who qualify for the post 9/11 GI bill,
- a surviving spouse or child who is eligible to receive benefits under the federal survivors and dependents education assistance program,
- members of the active and reserve components, including the National Guard, who are eligible for tuition assistance; and
- active duty members on temporary medical leave due to a service-connected disability.

The federal Choice Act covers veterans who are using their post-9/11 benefits who live in the state where they are attending school and who enrolled within three years of the veteran's discharge.

Effective immediately.

HISTORY: Passed House (199-0) 2/3/15

The legislation carries out the provisions of federal law --Section 702 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 -- known as the "Choice" Act. The Veterans Administration had set a July 1, 2015 deadline for states to comply with this law. (On May 15, that deadline was extended until December 31, 2015.) A school that fails to comply would no longer be eligible to receive GI funding.

Current law requires that the in-state tuition rate be charged for military personnel, their dependents and civilian personnel assigned to an active-duty station in Pennsylvania. Under current law, they would have to establish a year of residency in order to receive the in-state tuition rate.

AMENDMENT:

An amendment will be offered to clarify that eligibility includes veterans, spouses and dependents, and others who may have had military educational benefits transferred to them (e.g., step-children, former spouses, etc.).

Further changes the effective date from “immediately” to “July 1, 2015, or immediately, whichever is later.”