



Testimony
Senate Education and Veterans' Affairs and Emergency
Preparedness Committees
Fostering Veteran-Friendly Campuses
Ronald J. Tomalis, Secretary of Education
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Good morning Chairman Piccola, Chairwoman Baker, Chairman Dinniman, Chairman Solobay and distinguished members of the Senate Education and Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committees. Thank you for calling this meeting to discuss fostering veteran-friendly campuses. I welcome this chance to discuss the department's role in advancing this effort.

The Department of Education reaches out to veterans in our Commonwealth through the work of the Bureau of Postsecondary and Adult Education, Division of Veterans Education, which is funded completely through the Veterans Administration. One of the basic things the department provides to veterans is approval of educational programs in which they can use their GI Bill benefits. These approved programs have benefited veterans in 610 educational institutions and 608 On-the-Job Training establishments.

In addition the Division of Veterans Education assists schools and veterans navigate the complicated world of GI Bill benefits. Currently in Pennsylvania there are a little over 13,000 veterans taking advantage of their GI Bill benefits.

We recognize that in creating a veteran-friendly campus it is important to have transparency in regard to financial benefits. Department staff provides annual training to school certifying officials. This comprehensive training provides detailed information to schools to ensure veterans get the benefits they have earned and deserve, such as the granting of prior credit earned, as appropriate, for each veteran's chosen program of study. The Division of Veterans Education also provides information on how veterans can best use their benefits to accelerate learning by taking advantage of summer and non-traditional programs.

There is an emphasis on a hands-on approach when it comes to problem solving with our veterans. In the course of approving programs and monitoring, the department provides follow-up technical assistance, as needed. In addition, during monitoring visits, veterans have the opportunity to meet with and discuss their concerns with department staff. Anytime a veteran has contacted the department to file a complaint, we have been able to resolve these matters to the individual's satisfaction in a timely and efficient manner. Complaints received at the

Department against colleges and universities are minimal, only receiving between 1 to 5 a year. Most concerns are centered on the time it takes to obtain reimbursement from the Veterans Administration for their monthly living expenses, books and supplies. The staff here explains how the process works and offers assistance to them.

I would like to briefly focus on two efforts underway to help Pennsylvania veterans in postsecondary education.

First, a common benefit that Pennsylvania shares with several other states is the awarding of credit for military training or military service. This is accomplished at the institutional level. Colleges and universities decide what training or service is applicable to the student's course work and award credit accordingly. The American Council on Education (ACE) has developed guidelines for determining credit which institutions can use when awarding credit.

Second, 10 states, including Pennsylvania, have enacted laws that would change the residency requirements for in-state tuition. This is accomplished by allowing military personnel, currently stationed in Pennsylvania to receive the benefit of in-state tuition.

Like many of you, I serve as a board member for the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA). I would like to mention the benefit that PHEAA provides to veterans in the Commonwealth, through the existing State Grant program. PHEAA does not take into account the Expected Family Contribution and any Pell award received for all military applicants, allowing qualified veterans to be eligible for the highest State Grant possible. Over the past five years alone, PHEAA has awarded more than \$41 million in grants to veterans in Pennsylvania.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify about the department's role in ensuring that our institutions of postsecondary education are welcoming and ready to accommodate our veterans.