



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY AND HOMELAND SECURITY February 16, 2016

HB 2567

Blake Flanders, Ph.D. President and CEO Kansas Board of Regents

Good afternoon Chairman Goico and Members of the Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2567 which would reinstate the eligibility for resident tuition rates previously granted by the Legislature to certain military veterans and their families.

On May 29, 2015, Governor Brownback signed into law a bill that authorized all 32 Kansas public postsecondary educational colleges and universities to make in-state tuition rates available to all veterans eligible for federal education benefits, as well as all current members of the armed forces regardless of time spent in the state. This new law became effective July 1, 2015.

This was done, in part, in response to federal legislation passed the previous year, known as the "Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act of 2014," which required all public universities to offer in-state tuition rates to veterans who are making use of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, who live in the state where the institution they intend to enroll at is located, and who file a letter of intent to establish residence in the state. Eligible spouses and dependent children also qualify for in-state tuition rates under this legislation. Prior to enactment of the 2015 legislation, state law did not authorize institutions to apply resident tuition rates in all the circumstances covered by the federal law.

In addition to extending the in-state tuition rate to veterans and any spouse or dependent child using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, the 2015 Legislature also included all current members of the armed forces for in-state tuition and fee purposes (defined as army, navy, marine corps, air force, coast guard, Kansas army or air national guard, or any branch of the military reserves of the United States), along with their spouses and dependent children, as long as the prospective student is enrolled or has been accepted for admission at a Kansas postsecondary educational institution.

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However, the language used to make these 2015 changes in state law inadvertently removed the statutory language that had previously allowed institutions to charge in-state tuition rates to veterans who are not making use of federal education benefits but who were once residents of Kansas and have chosen to return to our state following the completion of their military service. These individuals and their families had been deemed residents for tuition and fees purposes prior to the July 1, 2015 legislation. The Kansas Board of Regents believes that those drafting and sponsoring the 2015 legislation never intended to negatively impact veterans and their families who return to Kansas after being stationed or serving in this state while they were active military. Rather, the 2015 change in law was intended to include more veterans, not exclude those who previously would have been granted residency status for in-state tuition purposes.

The Board appreciates the Committee's consideration of this bill and asks that eligibility for this category of military veterans, and their families be reinstated.

We wish to echo the comments of Lt. Col. Evan Holt who first brought this concern to our attention, following the relocation of himself and his family back "home" to Kansas after more than twenty-five years of service in the armed forces. A Jayhawk himself, Lt. Col. Holt is now the proud father of a newly admitted Jayhawk and he has shared with us his desire to "ensure the laws for veterans, military members and their families are written to be as holistically inclusive as possible with the goal of bringing those who have served back to Kansas."

Thank you for your consideration.