

Date of Hearing: April 24, 2012

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
Paul J. Cook, Chair
AB 2133 (Blumenfield) – As Amended: March 21, 2012

SUBJECT: Veterans: priority registration

SUMMARY: This bill:

- 1) Titles this section the Combat to College Act of 2012.
- 2) Extends the priority registration for enrollment period for California State University (CSU) and California Community Colleges (CCC) for veterans from four years post discharge to fifteen years post discharge.
- 3) Extends the scope of programs covered by priority registration for enrollment; certificate programs will now be included.
- 4) Requests UC comply with these provisions.
- 5) Creates a reimbursable state mandate if so determined by the Commission on State Mandates.

EXISTING LAW grants priority enrollment for registration to veterans for four years post discharge from active duty. Priority enrollment gives veterans priority over other students when enrolling in classes. The law currently gives this priority for all degree programs.

Montgomery GI Bill: Fewer veterans use this federal education program since the advent of the Post 9/11 GI Bill Program, however, this program generally pays a total of 36 months of benefits for up to ten years post active duty.

Post 9/11 GI Bill: This newer education benefit program generally pays a total of 36 months of benefits for up to fifteen years post active duty.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown at this time.

COMMENTS: A veteran student may need some time, perhaps even years, before deciding to use GI bill benefits and go to school. The GI Bill programs recognize this by giving a long time during which the veteran may use his or her benefits. The bill as drafted makes a parallel accommodation, giving students who take some time to make the decision to go to school the benefit of priority enrollment when the student is ready.

There is a second component to the GI Bill programs, the number of academic months during which a student may receive benefits. The GI bill student generally has 36 months of benefits; the programs are designed to accommodate a student who works at a reasonable pace to obtain a degree or similar academic outcome before benefits run out. The bill as drafted, however, does not have a parallel provision; a veteran would receive an entire 15 years of priority enrollment for registration, not 36 months within 15 years as under the GI Bill.

According to the author, the existing priority enrollment of four years is not enough time because it does not mirror the timeline that veterans have to use their GI Bill benefits and because many veterans are not ready to pursue higher education within four years of separation from the military due to brain injuries, trauma, or life circumstances.

There are two main policy reasons for giving priority enrollment to veteran students. One is to support those veterans who are using their GI Bill so that they may have a reasonable chance to finish a degree before their benefits run out. A second reason is to recognize the sacrifice and service veterans have rendered to the country. The bill as drafted will both assist those veteran students who are using GI Bill benefits, trying to get through the system before benefits run out and all veteran students in recognition of their service.

The State is in a time of budget austerity and most of our institutions of higher education are impacted by deep budget cuts and applications from far more students than they can serve. Many, if not most students face challenges getting classes they need for their academic programs. Policymakers must balance the unique needs of veteran students who have served their nation honorably during a time of war against the needs of other students in a severely oversubscribed and budget-reduced higher education system.

According to the Assembly Committee on Higher Education:

Other priority registration efforts. After a year of study and research, this January the CCC Student Success Task Force (created by SB 1143, Liu, Chapter 409, Statutes of 2010), issued a report with 22 recommendations to improve CCC students' success in completing their certificates, degrees and educational goals. The report identifies core priorities—basic math and English instruction, transfer preparation, career technical training and degree attainment—and refocusing policies and future investments to support these priorities. A key recommendation is to give priority to returning and first-time students who have taken a diagnostic assessment, participated in orientation and have developed an educational plan. All students will need to identify a program of study within three semesters or they will lose their priority.

Priority registration for all degree programs. It is staff's understanding that existing law and practice provide priority enrollment for veterans and active duty military regardless of the course or degree program.

Pending Author's Amendments:

Staff is informed that the author plans to amend the bill to add language substantially similar to the following:

(d) Students who receive priority registration for enrollment pursuant to this section shall comply with the requirements of subdivision (a) of Section 78212.

Education Code Section 78212 is concerned with matriculation. Subsection (a) states:

For purposes of this article, “matriculation” means a process that brings a college and a student who enrolls for credit into an agreement for the purpose of realizing the student’s

educational objectives. The agreement involves the responsibilities of both parties to attain those objectives through the college's established programs, policies, and requirements.

The student's responsibilities under the agreement include the expression of at least a broad educational intent upon enrollment, the declaration of a specific educational objective within a reasonable period after enrollment, diligence in class attendance and completion of assigned coursework, and the completion of courses and maintenance of progress toward an educational goal according to standards established by the college, the district, and the state. [Emphasis added.]

Related legislation. SB 813 (Committee on Veterans Affairs), Chapter 375, Statutes of 2010, extended priority enrollment for veterans from two to four years. AB 194 (Beall), Chapter 458, Statutes of 2010, granted priority enrollment for five years to foster youth. SB 272 (Runner), Chapter 356, Statutes of 2007, as chaptered, established priority registration for two years for members of the military.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

National Association of Social Workers
American Legion- Department of California
AMVETS- Department of California
California Association of County Veteran Service Officers
California State Commanders Veterans Council
Vietnam Veterans of America- California State Council
Coast Community College District
North Orange County Community College District
South Orange County Community College District
Rancho Santiago Community College District
Orange County Community College Legislative Task Force

Support if amended

California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office
California Community College League

Opposition

None at this time.

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