

Testimony to the House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

HB 2615 Related to Veterans Eligibility in the Oregon Promise Program

January 26, 2023

The Honorable Dacia Grayber, Chair

House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

CC: Honorable Members of the House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

My Name is Nick Juarez, and I am a Marine Corps veteran, college student, and proud Oregonian. I grew up in the town of Aloha, Oregon and graduated from Aloha High School in 2017. In the fall of that same year, I made the decision to join the Marine Corps to try and find what my purpose was in this world. I didn't join the military for the benefits or for the status. I joined the military to find out who I was and to serve a purpose greater than myself. I never wanted to pursue a college degree, but on my way out of the military I realized that to succeed in the outside world, I needed to complement the skills I learned in the military with the essential skills that could only be attained at college. I'm currently in my second and last year at Portland Community College and I plan to transfer to Portland State University, in the fall, to pursue a double major in political science and social work. Many professions in my county and local cities require college degrees in order to be designated as "qualified" to be eligible for them. Without college I wouldn't be able to do what I want to do on the scale that I want to do it at. Without being afforded the financial opportunity to pursue a college degree, I wouldn't be able to achieve my goals and have the knowledge to make a lasting impact in my community.

There is no greater fear than coming back to a home that you no longer resonate with. There is also no greater sense of peace knowing that your community and state support your ambitions, goals, and individual well-being. To me, this isn't a bill for purely additional educational support to our veterans. To me, it's an opportunity to show them, even at a small level, that we support their individual endeavors. It's an opportunity to ease the pain of making the difficult decision to leave the family that you made by your time in the service and pursue greater goals. Transitioning back to civilian life isn't easy. Regardless if you're a veteran that saw combat overseas or if you're a veteran that supported the mission state side, none of us come back the same. We all lose a little piece of ourselves with our friends who were our greatest blessings and support structures.

There isn't a greater group of individuals than veterans that deserve additional education benefits. Less than one percent of the United States population serves in our armed forces. The tenacity for individuals to voluntarily sign years of their lives away, not knowing the places they'll go, the things they'll see, or the occasions they'll miss, is by itself, admirable. It's an injustice that the sole reason why veterans cannot participate in the Oregon Promise Grant is because of their willingness to put the nation before themselves. Many people think that the best our nation has to offer sit in lecture halls at Ivy League schools. The truth is, the best our nation could ever offer are the individuals who sit in fighting holes, faces marred by dirt, that no one will ever hear about.

Please support this bill and make this a home for the people who protect it. Thank you.

Very Respectfully,

Nick Juarez

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Juarez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nick" and last name "Juarez" clearly distinguishable.