

January 26, 2023

From:
Owen Johnson

To:
Representative Grayber;
House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
CC: Senator Bonham; Representative Helfrich
Re: Support for HB 2615

Chair Grayber and members of the committee,

I write in support of HB 2615. However, I propose amendments to the bill based on my own experiences as a veteran who has navigated the Oregon higher education system after the military. I did not grow up in Oregon, but I did find myself pursuing multiple college degrees in this state. I received an AA from Chemeketa Community College; a BS in political science from Western Oregon University; and I am currently in the process of receiving my law degree from Willamette University.

I fully support the spirit of this legislation to provide veterans with substantial financial support toward higher education. However, I take issue with requirements to receive the support. For instance, the 12-month residency requirement seems to be unreasonable considering the 12-month post-military enrollment requirement. This does not allow many veterans the chance to move here post-military and receive the benefit. I understand that the grant may impose a fiscal burden on the states' taxpayers. However, I suggest an overall review of the long-range income tax revenue of these veterans. This legislation – if drafted in a gratuitous fashion – could attract many veterans who are eager to achieve a higher level of education. Those veterans will go on to establish well-paying careers and some will create businesses which employ others – likely within this state; creating job which will generate tax revenue via income and other areas.

The amendments I propose include:

- Reduce the 12-month residency requirement. I moved to Oregon after the military for of a variety of reasons (I absolutely love this state), and I can foresee this legislation attracting many talented veterans to do the same. Many veterans don't return to their "home" state after the military, and we can attract their talents and sense of purpose;
- Omit the High School GPA requirement for veterans. Many veterans, including myself, did not do well in high school (hence enlisting in the military instead of going off to college), but went on to have a newfound drive and focus toward attaining a higher level of education. Many veterans did not have a plethora of opportunities to succeed in high school and should not be penalized because of this.

As a post-graduate student who has utilized the GI Bill, I could have used this grant toward the lower-level of my higher education; rather than using the GI Bill to fund such low-cost tuition. I

truly wish I could have used a grant such as the Oregon Promise to subsidize my time at Chemeketa Community College and saved the GI Bill for my law degree. This is precisely why I can foresee this legislation – if drafted properly – to attract intelligent and talented veterans to our state who will in turn pay taxes and create tax-paying jobs.

Investing in the education of out-of-state veterans residing in Oregon would undoubtedly have a back-end revenue benefit. We should not skip out on the opportunity to attract people who have sacrificed everything to attain a few years of education. Those are the people who would benefit this state the most.

We should not pass up the opportunity to benefit so many veterans and this state.

Very Respectfully,

Owen Johnson