



**OREGON MILITARY DEPARTMENT**  
JOINT FORCE HEADQUARTERS, OREGON NATIONAL GUARD  
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL  
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April 18, 2023

The Honorable Senator Lew Frederick, Co-Chair  
The Honorable Representative Susan McLain, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education  
900 Court Street NE, Salem, OR 97301-4048

Dear Co-Chairpersons:

The Oregon Military Department and the Oregon National Guard respectfully submit this letter in support of the budget request from the Higher Education Coordination Commission (HECC) which supports both the current Oregon National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program (ONGSTA) and the ONGSTA Dependent Extension Program (ONGSTA-DEP) outlined in SB 1032 working through the 2023 legislative session. The ONGSTA Program was established in 2018 via House Bill 4035. Modifications to the program enhancing its effectiveness and usefulness for Oregon National Guard Service Members were approved in the 2019 and 2021 Sessions<sup>1</sup>.

Since its inception the ONGSTA program has become a foundational recruiting and retention tool for the Oregon National Guard. In addition to a desire and commitment to defend our state and nation, the ability to obtain an education is one of the top reasons cited by Service Members as why they choose to join the all-volunteer Armed Services. Having this tool available to give back to our Service Members is of the utmost value to the Oregon Military Department. It is also critical to note that prior to this program's establishment Oregon was the only state in the nation which did not offer any form of State Tuition Assistance to National Guard Service Members. We anticipate that extending this benefit through the ONGSTA-DEP to our Service Members' dependents will significantly improve our ability to retain our valued members.

Our partners within HECC have showcased exceptional leadership and perseverance in managing this complicated and much needed program. Because of their efforts, 912 Oregon National Guard Service Members have received educational benefits between fall term 2018 and summer term 2022. During the 2022-2023 academic year, another 212 Service Members are signed up to participate in the program, and we expect that number to continue to grow.

Ensuring resources are available to these Service Members is of paramount importance to the Oregon Military Department. Should adequate funding not be allocated, HECC outlines what the corresponding impacts to Service Members could be, and which would disproportionately impact lower income Service Members. Beyond losing access to benefits paying for books and fees, Service Members may also see the implementation of a tiered structure to determine

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<sup>1</sup> HB 2817 (2019 Session) / SB 101 (2021 Session)

tuition awards. A tiered structure will disproportionately impact lower income Service Members who depend on ONGSTA to cover the majority of their tuition costs.

As the Adjutant General for the State of Oregon it is my responsibility to see to the welfare and development of the Service Members under my command. My enduring mission is to ensure these Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen, who come from every corner of this State, are recognized and supported for wearing the uniform and serving faithfully. This program directly impacts our recruiting and retention and builds a bench of educated leaders. Both the Executive and Legislative branches in Oregon have been committed partners in this mission, and I am eternally grateful for the support that has been provided by them.

Please consider approving the request submitted by High Education Coordination Commission for funding related to the Oregon National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael E. Stencel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M".

Michael E. Stencel  
Major General  
The Adjutant General