

**National Guard Association of Connecticut
360 Broad Street
Hartford, CT. 06105-3795**

**Testimony to the Veterans Affairs Committee
March 3, 2009**

Good morning to all the members of the Veterans affairs Committee. I apologize for not being able to be there in person today, I am in Washington D.C. this week working on Veterans issues nationally. I am Dennis Oparowski an Army Veteran and an Operation Iraqi Freedom 2003 Veteran. I am also the Co-Legislative chair of The National Guard Association of CT (NGACT) representing all of our members on Raised Bill 901 An Act Concerning Fees Paid By Members Of The Connecticut National Guard At Community-Technical Colleges, The Connecticut State University System and The University of Connecticut.

Student fees once again tops our agenda this year. Why, because that is where we can serve our men and women the best. This one program is the tool we need to further the minds of some of most brightest and future leaders of our Connecticut National Guard. It is also a very big reason why men and women choose to join or stay in the Connecticut National Guard. Whether they become Officers or Non-Commission officers or somewhere down the road just return as an everyday Connecticut citizens we will all be better off for it.

I was here just a month ago when Congressman Courtney and the Colleges within our state unveiled a program to work more closely with our veterans to give and guide them through the transition of going back to college, especially after they redeploy from the war and try to get back to a normal way of life. They stood proudly and one after another exclaimed how much they were going to do for Veterans. I have come to believe the real reason why they are so interested in Veterans is because of the new GI Bill and that it will bring tens of thousands of federal dollars into their colleges. Not because they are so in tuned with what veterans need.

If I am wrong then they should help find a way to make this bill a reality, and not be so against this bill? These institutions have continued to try with success to circumvent the original intent of this bill of a paid college education for Veterans by the State of Connecticut and this legislative body some years past? The colleges have changed or added a few words or in this case now call for fees to be paid. Those fees are not part of the original Tuition Assistance Bill and are rising faster and higher than tuition itself in some cases. Play on words, fuzzy math, call it what you will. What I and others call it is unacceptable.

If these Universities are so into Veterans why is it that a Guardsman in school now, who has transferred from Eastern to Southern, will not accept his level 300 core courses from the same University system. They will however accept them as electives but not core. Which means he now has to take level 100 core courses at Southern before they even allow him back into the level 300 courses. Do they not go by the same standards within their own University system? Do they not cover and teach with the same intent of the course for one University within the same State to another? This is not just a Veteran problem; it's universal to all that have transferred.

In point, I reference a testimony letter written by the Chancellor of the Connecticut State University System to this committee on February 3rd, 2009. The monies Chancellor Carter refers to are all federal dollars. With in influx of these dollars they are now competing with other colleges for those same veteran dollars. I would be Veteran friendly too if I saw that coming down the pike. Lets be honest it is all about

the money as Chancellor Carter eluded to at the bottom of the first page of his testimony. There is nothing wrong with that and if you are in business that is what you should be concerned with. The situation again is that they have found a way to circumvent the original intent of the National Guard Tuition Waiver Bill by adding fees instead of raising the actual cost of tuition which by the way is very misleading to the general public on the true cost of a college education.

Now we can choose to do nothing because of State of the State, and say wait until the pot begins to fill up again. Or we can lose this generation who have earned these education benefits. They earn them because we passed a law previously that said they earned them. Unfortunately we now have to pass another law that basically returns those already earned rights to those we say we respect so much.

Respectfully,

Dennis Oparowski
National Guard Association of Connecticut
Co-Legislative Chair