



COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT:

HEARING ON H.B. 5207

February 27, 2014

The Honorable Steve Cassano
The Honorable Roberta B. Willis
Co-Chairs
Joint Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement
Room 1800, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Cassano and Representative Willis:

The Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC) writes today in support of H.B. 5207, *An Act Concerning College Credit for Military Training*. CVLC is an organization devoted to helping veterans recovering from homelessness and mental illness overcome barriers to housing, healthcare, and income.

For many veterans, the very first barrier to these goals is a smooth transition from military to civilian life. More than a quarter of a million veterans currently call Connecticut home and 8,000 more will soon return to the state as the drawdown unfolds. To obtain qualifications for the civilian labor market, many of these veterans choose to enroll in Connecticut's higher education institutions. Crediting military experience is thus crucial to helping veterans move from war to the workforce.

Substitute Language: Make Credits Mandatory to Maximize Effectiveness

As written, H.B. 5207 encourages Connecticut's public colleges and universities to provide credit for military training and experience. The bill would be even more productive if it required, rather than permitted, state educational institutions to provide military credits where appropriate. Making the language in H.B. 5207 mandatory would mean that educational institutions uniformly and consistently recognize veterans' experience where it is applicable.

Creating a uniform system of academic crediting is vitally important to supporting Connecticut's economy, and its veterans. When educational credit is provided ad hoc across institutions of higher education, both veterans and educators are left uncertain about how military experience counts toward a degree. This approach results in inconsistent policies and deters veterans from pursuing higher education at Connecticut's public colleges and universities.

Take, for instance, a veteran student who has worked as an engineer on a nuclear powered submarine. Under the current system, when he comes home and goes to college, he may be forced to repeat foundational engineering courses. Faced with redundant and confusing requirements, he may instead seek an education out-of-state, in places like New York and Maryland, which have already acted to provide uniform credit for veterans' in-service education.

With the passage of H.B. 5207, that student would instead be attracted to a Connecticut college, and ultimately, to Connecticut's workforce. This bill will mean fewer veterans that come to organizations like CVLC out of work and in dire need of legal and other social services.

H.B. 5207 Will Improve Connecticut's Competitiveness

In passing H.B. 5207 with amended language, the General Assembly would not only do a service to those who served. This bill also brings Connecticut up to par with its neighbors. In Maryland, for instance, the Maryland Higher Education Commission is in the process of enacting uniform guidelines for awarding educational credit for military training, coursework and education. Those guidelines apply to all public higher educational institutions in the state.

In our neighbor state, New York, Governor Cuomo has already acted to standardize military credits. Governor Cuomo's "Experience Counts" campaign requires the State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY) to flag applications received from veterans and active duty personnel. Those institutions provide uniform military credits. They also designate a guidance counselor at each college and university to guide veterans through the process and to ensure that they are awarded the maximum amount of credit for their prior military training.

Minnesota provides yet another model of progress on this issue. In that state, a veteran need only go to the higher education website, provide basic information about her military experience, and click a button to learn everything she needs to know about military credits at the state's public institutions of higher education.¹

To remain competitive with our neighbors, Connecticut needs to create a similar system. We can start by passing H.B. 5207.

On Tuesday, the Veterans Affairs Committee heard public testimony on two bills, S.B. 212 and H.B. 5299. Those bills would provide educational credits and amend licensing requirements to help veterans enter the workforce and higher education. The testimony before the Veterans Affairs Committee proved, over and over again, how important it is for Connecticut to act to promote veterans' entry into higher education.

H.B. 5207 is a crucial piece of the puzzle. This bill is a boon for Connecticut's veterans, for its economy, and for the quality of its higher educational institutions. We strongly support passage of the bill and we welcome any questions from Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

¹ See <http://www.mnscu.edu/military/transfer.html>

Sincerely,

Margaret Middleton

Co-Founder and Executive Director
Connecticut Veterans Legal Center
(203) 903-2852
mmiddleton@ctveteranslegal.org