

# Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6439

AN ACT CONCERNING A FEE WAIVER AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CERTAIN VETERANS AND MEMBERS OF THE

**Title:** NATIONAL GUARD.

**Vote Date:** 3/11/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 1/30/2025

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to exempt certain veterans and servicemembers from fees related to educational extension programs. Currently, veterans and active duty servicemembers who served in time of war receive free tuition at public institutions of higher education in Connecticut. Recently though, the fees that accompany this tuition have been increasing. By waiving the payment of fees for extension programs, this bill would take a step towards honoring the intent of the tuition waiver and making sure that veterans and servicemembers can attend a public college for free.

The original language of this bill only applies to fall and spring semesters; the substitute language amends that and exempts fees for winter and summer semesters as well.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

### NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**CT National Guard Association**: Two members of the CT National Guard Association expressed their support for the bill, stating that while it does not eliminate all fees that fall outside the tuition waiver it does take an important step towards "providing completely free college to Guardsmen". Testifiers included:

- **Katie Zarzycka, President**

- **Daniel DePasquale, Vice President**

**K. Robert Lewis, Legislative Committee Chair, American Legion Department of CT:** Mr. Lewis stated that the American Legion supports this bill.

**Michael Mungavin:** Mr. Mungavin shared his belief that this bill will improve the lives of National Guard members by expanding the affordability measures provided by the existing tuition waiver. He notes that because winter and summer terms are treated as educational extension programs, the fees associated are not currently covered by the tuition waiver. Mr. Mungavin also expressed his gratitude for the National Guard and its members in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Samuel Bernstein, Sergeant, Connecticut Army National Guard:** Sgt. Bernstein expressed his gratitude for this bill, explaining his history in higher education and how his service in the National Guard gave him the discipline to pursue a degree. He noted that many public colleges and universities charge high fees in order to get around the tuition waiver for National Guard members; some charge fees that exceed the cost of tuition, and some use a fee-per-credit billing system in lieu of tuition.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Michelle Cole:** Ms. Cole requested that the committee oppose all bills before it, especially the bill related to the Governor's Guards.

**Anonymous:** An anonymous individual expressed his dismay that tradition is lost in the US and would like to avoid Connecticut becoming a mini-California.

**Reported by: Sam Sims**

**Date: 3/12/2025**