
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Benjamin Allen, Chair

2017 - 2018 Regular

Bill No: SB 694 **Hearing Date:** April 19, 2017
Author: Newman
Version: April 5, 2017
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Olgalilia Ramirez

Subject: California Community Colleges: Veteran Resource Centers

NOTE: This bill has been referred to the Committees on Education and *Veterans Affairs*. A "do pass" motion should include referral to the Committee on *Veterans Affairs*.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges (CCC) to ensure that each of its campuses provides a dedicated on-campus Veteran Resource Center that offers services to help student veterans transition successfully from military life to educational success.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Authorizes the California State University (CSU) and the CCC, and encourages the University of California (UC) to coordinate services for qualified students who are veterans or members of the military by clearly designating Military and Veterans Offices and individuals to provide specified services to qualified students. Current law defines "qualified student" as a student who is any of the following: an active-duty member of the Armed Forces of the United States, the California National Guard, a reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States, a veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States, and/or a family member of a person (as described above) who is a legal dependent under 28 years of age or living in the household of that person and eligible to be claimed as a dependent on federal or state tax returns. (Education Code § 69785)
- 2) Authorizes CSU, CCC, and encourages UC to report annually to the California Department of Veterans Affairs the number of qualified students assisted by a Military and Veterans Office; the number of qualified students assisted who are active duty members of the Armed Forces of the United States, the California National Guard, or a reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States, or are veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States; and the total education benefits by all qualified students assisted by an office. (EC § 69786)

ANALYSIS

This bill requires the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges (CCC) to ensure that each of its campuses provides a dedicated on-campus Veteran Resource Center that offers services to help student veterans transition successfully from military life to educational success. Specifically, it;

- 1) Requires each Veteran Resource Center to at a minimum:
 - a) Be open 25 hours a week.
 - b) Be staffed by veterans whenever possible.
 - c) Be 400 square feet and fully accessible.
 - d) Provide enrolled veteran students with all of the following:
 - i. Academic counseling and tutoring support.
 - ii. Peer support and mentoring services.
 - iii. Financial aid information and application assistance.
 - iv. Referral to on-and off-campus resources.
 - v. Access to computers with printing, copying and faxing capabilities.
 - vi. Veterans Affairs certifying officials.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) **Need for the bill.** The CCC system serves 70,000 veterans and active duty services members. According to the author, some colleges have successful Veteran Resource Centers which offer a variety of services while other colleges offer rudimentary service or none at all. The author asserts, these students face unique challenges in their transition back to civilian life and services are essential to the success of veterans and every veteran should receive the same level of service no matter where they decide to attend school. This bill seeks to build on the success of existing efforts by establishing standards for Veterans Resource Centers at community colleges.
- 2) ***Existing efforts to support student veterans at community colleges.*** There is wide acknowledgment among the CCC of the re-entry challenges many student veterans face and colleges have recognized the need to expand support services to help veterans successfully integrate into college life. The Community College Chancellor's office, in response to the growing number of student veterans and to provide statewide leadership and coordination to assist the colleges has led several statewide efforts that include; 1) appointing a full-time Veteran Services Specialist, 2) hosting an annual summit to share information and best practices for staff, faculty and administrators who work with student veteran's services 3) supporting the development and implementation of a training program for faculty and staff to increase awareness of military culture

and challenges faced by many community college student veterans through the participation in the “Welcome Home Training Program,” and; 4) supporting the development of Veterans Resource Center project.

Approximately 77 of 113 colleges have Veterans Resource Centers that range in space and support services but for the most part these centers help to facilitate academic success and assist in psychosocial reintegration. Although there is inconsistency in the level of support throughout the system, each community college district is required to maintain a student equity plan to ensure equal educational opportunities and to promote student success for all students with focused attention on certain categories of students that must be addressed, including veterans. This bill seeks to raise the standards for high-quality programming and services to meet the specific needs of this emerging student population.

- 3) ***Too prescriptive?*** Notwithstanding the potential need for additional resources for community colleges to implement high quality services for student veterans, the proposed requirements in this bill limit campus flexibility in the delivery of such services. With 113 community colleges ranging in campus size, student enrollment and capacity the committee may want to consider whether the proposed requirements are too prescriptive for some campuses, particularly a small campus that may not have the physical space or staff capacity to fulfill this requirement and meet their local needs.

Rather than require the Chancellor’s Office to ensure that each of its campuses provides a dedicated on-campus Veteran Resource Center, **staff recommends** the bill be amended to require the Chancellor’s Office of the California Community Colleges (CCC) to *consider* establishment of a dedicated on-campus Veteran Resource Center at each of its campuses, as described in the bill. The author has agreed to accept this amendment, to be adopted when this bill is heard by the Committee on Veterans Affairs.

- 4) ***Prior legislation.***

AB 2494 (Roger Hernandez, 2016) would have established the Veteran Resource Centers Grant Program and the Veteran Resource Centers fund in the State Treasury for purposes of providing resources to veterans and active duty military enrolled at a CCC campus. AB 2494 was held on the suspense file in Senate Appropriations.

AB 393 (Roger Hernández, 2015) nearly identical to this bill, would have established a grant program to support CCC veterans' resource centers. AB 393 was held on the suspense file in the Assembly Appropriations.

AB 421 (Calderon, 2015) would have, among others, required the governing board of a community college district to provide in each CCC within the district, a veterans counselor. AB 421 was held on the suspense file in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SUPPORT

None received.

OPPOSITION

None received.

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