

HCS HB 2062 & 1518 -- MILITARY FAMILIES AND TUITION GRANTS FOR VETERANS' SURVIVORS

SPONSOR: Day (Pearce)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Special Committee on Veterans by a vote of 11 to 0.

This substitute changes the laws regarding members of the military and their families. In its main provisions, the substitute:

(1) Adds the chairman of the Missouri Veterans Commission to the Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission and clarifies that the commission's duties include developing policies and methods to improve the prosperity and employment opportunities of retired military members and the families of former military members;

(2) Specifies that the chair of the Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission will be an ex officio member of the Missouri Veterans Commission and the enhancement commission will help veterans who are legal residents of Missouri;

(3) Allows a person in federal service who is eligible to register, but has not registered, to vote in any election. Currently, a person in federal service can only vote in a federal election;

(4) Allows a military dependent who has completed an accredited prekindergarten or kindergarten program in another state to enter kindergarten or first grade even if the child has not reached the required age for Missouri schools by August 1;

(5) Requires the State Board of Education to establish a rule to allow the issuance of a provisional teacher's certificate before the completion of a background check to the spouse of a military member who holds a teacher's certificate in another state that requires a background check and who has relocated within the last year;

(6) Allows school districts to accept a course in government completed in another state when a student transfers to a Missouri high school in ninth to twelfth grade to satisfy the state's graduation requirement;

(7) Allows the spouse and children of a soldier who is killed in action after September 11, 2001, or who becomes 80% disabled as the result of an injury sustained in combat action after

September 11, 2001, to receive an educational grant for tuition at a public or private college or university in Missouri. The Coordinating Board of Higher Education will award up to 25 grants annually. If the waiting list of eligible survivors exceeds 50, the board can ask the General Assembly to increase the number of grants it is authorized to award. The tuition grant cannot exceed what is charged a resident by the University of Missouri-Columbia. The veteran must have been a Missouri resident when first entering military service or at the time of death in order for his or her survivors to receive this grant. In addition to the full cost of tuition, the grant includes \$2,000 per semester for room and board and the actual cost of books up to \$500 per semester. Children are eligible to receive the scholarship until age 25. Spouses are eligible until age 45. No eligible student will receive a grant for more than 100% of the tuition costs when combined with other similar funds given to the student;

(8) Renames the Guard at Home Program to the Hero at Home Program and extends the program to cover the first year after discharge from deployment, to cover reservists, and to cover situations in which an individual cannot return to his or her previous employment;

(9) Requires the Department of Higher Education to establish a rule ensuring that resident tuition continues to be available to the spouse and dependents of any military family who remain in Missouri after the military member has retired, died, or been reassigned;

(10) Requires the State Board of Education to pursue reciprocity agreements with other states for the transfer of students who are military dependents and specifies the contents of the agreements, which focus on the granting of credit;

(11) Requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to facilitate agreements between school districts and military installations to address strategies to assist children in transition to Missouri schools;

(12) Specifies that certain military dependents will be eligible to enroll full time in courses through the Missouri Virtual School; and

(13) Allows school districts to establish course credit and other policies to assist military dependents in meeting graduation requirements.

The provisions of the substitute regarding tuition grants will expire six years from the effective date.

The substitute contains an emergency clause except for the provisions regarding membership in the Missouri Preparedness and Enhancement Commission and the renaming of the Guard at Home Program.

FISCAL NOTE: Estimated Cost on General Revenue Fund of \$223,424 to \$377,110 to Unknown in FY 2009, \$416,847 to \$733,439 to Unknown in FY 2010, and \$605,038 to \$1,094,172 to Unknown in FY 2011. No impact on Other State Funds in FY 2009, FY 2010, and FY 2011.

PROPOSERS: Supporters of House Bill 2062 say that a member of the Missouri Veterans Commission on the Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission will help the enhancement commission in the development of long-term prosperity, not only of the military, but veterans in this state. Students who are military dependents have many obstacles trying to complete their elementary and secondary education requirements, and the bill will help them reach their educational goals without being penalized by inflexible bureaucratic policies. The bill will help the Guard at Home Program by expanding the time period in which guard and reservists can apply for the workforce development services they need after serving on active duty.

Supporters of House Bill 1518 say that the bill will give a little help to those people whose parents or spouses have given the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

Testifying for HB 2062 were Representatives Pearce and Witte; and Division of Workforce Development, Department of Economic Development.

Testifying for HB 1518 were Representative Cunningham (145); Dewey Riehn, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Missouri Chapter; Ernie Lee, Missouri Association of Veterans Organizations and Military Officers Association of America, State Council; and Missouri Veterans Commission.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.