

AN ACT concerning education.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Higher Education Veterans Service Act.

Section 5. Definitions. For purposes of this Act:

"Task Force" means the Task Force on Service Member and Veterans Education.

"Public colleges and universities" means public community colleges subject to the Public Community College Act, the University of Illinois, Southern Illinois University, Chicago State University, Eastern Illinois University, Governors State University, Illinois State University, Northeastern Illinois University, Northern Illinois University, and Western Illinois University.

Section 10. Findings.

(a) Pursuant to Public Act 95-736, the General Assembly created the Task Force on Service Member and Veterans Education to examine the manner in which public colleges and universities in the State of Illinois provided education to servicemen and servicewomen as well as veterans of the armed forces of the United States.

The Task Force conducted hearings and filed its findings with the General Assembly on September 16, 2008. Its report urges the General Assembly to recognize the sacrifice of American servicemen and women, and, in a small way, repay them by chartering a concerted effort by State government, in cooperation with our public institutions of higher learning, to make its best efforts to take positive, quantifiable steps to providing a superior learning environment for student veterans and service members. The Task Force reviewed the unique needs of veterans and military personnel, combined with the large number of active duty personnel and military veterans seeking higher education since the onset of the Global War on Terrorism. The Task Force found that public universities and community colleges in this State have varying levels of assistance available for active duty service personnel and veterans.

(b) The Task Force has reported that veterans and active duty personnel have difficulty in finding and receiving various State and federal education-related benefits and services that they may be eligible to receive, such as educational loans, scholarships, grants, local employment opportunities, access to medical care, a social network for support of student veterans, and groups to help with the transition to becoming a civilian after service in an active duty unit, because such programs are administered by different arms of the government.

(c) The Task Force found that the various public colleges

and universities in this State have a wide array of programs and services available to veterans and active duty service personnel, ranging from online educational opportunities, admission and academic counseling, medical services, and family housing information.

(d) The Task Force also found that certain other higher education institutions across the United States have adopted programs and services that seek to better promote and coordinate the assistance that is available for veterans and active duty personnel.

Section 15. Survey; coordinator; best practices report; best efforts.

(a) All public colleges and universities shall, within 60 days after the effective date of this Act, conduct a survey of the services and programs that are provided for veterans, active duty military personnel, and their families, at each of their respective campuses. This survey shall enumerate and fully describe the service or program that is available, the number of veterans or active duty personnel using the service or program, an estimated range for potential use within a 5-year and 10-year period, information on the location of the service or program, and how its administrators may be contacted. The survey shall indicate the manner or manners in which a student veteran may avail himself or herself of the program's services. This survey must be made available to all

veterans matriculating at the college or university in the form of an orientation-related guidebook.

Each public college and university shall make the survey available on the homepage of all campus Internet links as soon as practical after the completion of the survey. As soon as possible after the completion of the survey, each public college and university shall provide a copy of its survey to the following:

- (1) the Board of Higher Education;
- (2) the Department of Veterans' Affairs;
- (3) the President and Minority Leader of the Senate and the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House of Representatives; and
- (4) the Governor.

(b) Each public college and university shall, at its discretion, (i) appoint, within 6 months after the effective date of this Act, an existing employee or (ii) hire a new employee to serve as a Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services on each campus of the college or university that has an onsite, daily, full-time student headcount above 1,000 students.

The Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services shall be an ombudsperson serving the specific needs of student veterans and military personnel and their families and shall serve as an advocate before the administration of the college or university for the needs of student veterans. The

college or university shall enable the Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services to communicate directly with the senior executive administration of the college or university periodically. The college or university shall retain unfettered discretion to determine the organizational management structure of its institution.

In addition to any responsibilities the college or university may assign, the Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services shall make its best efforts to create a centralized source for student veterans and military personnel to learn how to receive all benefit programs and services for which they are eligible.

Each college and university campus that is required to have a Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services shall regularly and conspicuously advertise the office location, phone number, and Internet access to the Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services, along with a brief summary of the manner in which he or she can assist student veterans. The advertisement shall include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

- (1) advertisements on each campus' Internet home page;
- and
- (2) any promotional mailings for student application.

The Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services shall facilitate other campus offices with the promotion of programs and services that are available.

(c) Upon receipt of all of the surveys under subsection (a) of this Section, the Board of Higher Education and the Department of Veterans' Affairs shall conduct a joint review of the surveys and post, on any Internet home page they may operate, a link to each survey as posted on the Internet website for the college or university. Upon receipt of all of the surveys, the Office of the Governor, through its military affairs advisors, shall similarly conduct a review of the surveys and post the surveys on its Internet website. Following its review of the surveys, the Office of the Governor shall submit an evaluation report to each college and university offering suggestions and insight on the conduct of student veteran-related policies and programs.

(d) The Board of Higher Education and the Department of Veterans' Affairs may issue a best practices report to highlight those programs and services that are most beneficial to veterans and active duty military personnel. The report shall contain a fiscal needs assessment in conjunction with any program recommendations.

(e) Each college and university campus that is required to have a Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services under subsection (b) of this Section shall make its best efforts to create academic and social programs and services for veterans and active duty military personnel that will provide reasonable opportunities for academic performance and success.

Each public college and university shall make its best efforts to determine how its online educational curricula can be expanded or altered to serve the needs of student veterans and currently-deployed military, including a determination of whether and to what extent the public colleges and universities can share existing technologies to improve the online curricula of peer institutions, provided such efforts are both practically and economically feasible.

Section 20. Fiscal impact and reporting. Beginning on September 1 of the year following the effective date of this Act and each subsequent September 1, each college and university that is required to have a Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student Services under subsection (b) of Section 20 of this Act shall report to the Board of Higher Education on the fiscal impact of the programs and services related to the requirements of this Act.

The Board of Higher Education shall compile the information and, within 60 days after receipt of such information, issue a report reflecting the information for each institution required to report under this Section. The report must be filed with the Governor, the Governor's Office of Management and Budget, the Director of Veterans' Affairs, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, and the Minority Leader of the Senate.

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Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon becoming law.