

HOUSE BILL 2228 Testimony

Presented To

Senate and State Affairs Committee

By Bruce Fischbach, State Commander

Kansas Veterans of Foreign Wars

Chairman Senator Ostmeyer, Vice Chairman Senator Laturner, Ranking Minority Member Senator Faust-Goudeau, Committee members Senator Holland, Holmes, Longbine, Olson, Wilborn and Wolf.

Thank you for allowing me to send this testimony to you, in favor of HB2228.

On August 7, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014. The bill passed the US House of Representatives by a vote of 420 – 5 and US Senate with a vote of 91 – 3. There was clear and overwhelming bi-partisan support for the bill.

A key portion of the new federal law grants veterans and their families the right to in-state tuition at public colleges and universities, regardless of where the service or family member is currently living. But only if, they are using Post 9/11 GI Bill money.

Today, the Post 9/11 GI Bill covers all tuition and fee payments for in-state students. Currently public colleges and universities in 27 states already offer non-resident veterans in-state tuition rates. On July 1st, 2015, schools that don't allow non-resident veterans in-state tuition rates, will not be able to participate in the Post-9/11 and Montgomery GI Bill programs, forcing student veterans to use education benefits elsewhere and perhaps outside the State of Kansas. Last year Kansas veterans and schools received over \$104 million in education benefits.

With three major military reservations in Kansas; McConnell AFB in Wichita, Ft. Riley in the Junction City/Manhattan area and Ft. Leavenworth in Leavenworth; the State of Kansas stands to lose credibility with our large veteran community if our legislators do not pass this bill. Can we as a state really afford not to support this bill?

The greatest impact will be on recently discharged veterans who decide to attend college in states where they served last on active duty. Until they establish residency, they face out-of-state tuition and fees that their GI Bill benefits won't cover, often costing them additional thousands of dollars.

Mandatory deployments around the country or the world that are an integral part of military service and might potentially deprive veterans of the in-state status that they otherwise would have enjoyed. Unfortunately, many schools disqualify veterans from receiving in-state tuition because outdated residency policies don't accommodate for the unique circumstances of military life. Please do not let Kansas be one of those states.

The importance of passing HB 2228 legislation is twofold: first and foremost it's the right thing to do for veterans. Veterans who leave the service in Kansas and desire to stay in Kansas, but have a different home of record or don't qualify for in-state tuition, shouldn't have to pay out of state rates. Secondly it is also good for Kansas economy to allow veterans who want move to Kansas for school and possibly make Kansas their home. There are immediate economic benefits to local Kansas towns where the schools are located as well. From housing, to utilities, to shopping, to dining and many other businesses in and around college towns. All would benefit from the passage of this bill.

In summation, The VFW, the American Legion and the Student Veterans of America all worked together to get this law passed at the national level. As the State Commander of nearly 25,000 veterans, all of whom were put in harm's way; we urge and encourage you to support and pass this bill. It is the least we can do for those who have served and fought for this country; as well as for the families who supported them while they were serving. The Department of Kansas VFW strongly urges the passage of HB2228.

Thank you all for your time, and service to the State of Kansas.

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce R. Fischbach

State Commander, Department of Kansas Veterans of Foreign Wars