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Major General Michael T. Venerdi
The Adjutant General and Director of
Emergency Management & Homeland Security

Laura Kelly, Governor

February 6, 2025

Committee on Education
Kansas House of Representatives
Chairwoman Susan Estes
Attn: Michelle Sims, Committee Assistant
State Capitol, Room 218-N
300 SW 10th Ave
Topeka, KS 66612

Name: Lt. Col. Jacob McElwee
Organization: The Adjutant General's Department
Contact: jacob.d.mcelwee.mil@army.mil, 785-646-0056
Bill: HB 2185, Updating the Kansas National Guard Assistance Act
Position: Proponent
Type: In-person
Date: February 6, 2025

Dear Chairwoman Estes and Members of the Committee,

The Adjutant General's Department respectfully submits the following testimony for the hearing on House Bill 2185, Updating the Kansas National Guard Assistance Act, on February 6, 2025. My legal advisor, Lt. Col. Jacob McElwee, will testify on my behalf.

Kansas National Guard tuition assistance falls under two programs - the Kansas National Guard Education Assistance Act for undergraduate studies and the EMERGE Act for graduate studies. We are asking for a policy update for these programs to bring them in line with similar programs at the federal level and in other states so we can retain our personnel and compete for the best recruits nationally. We are **not** asking for any additional money; this is a policy update only.

When a Kansas National Guard member uses the Kansas National Guard Education Assistance Act, they incur a service commitment. They must continue to serve in the Kansas National Guard for two years beyond the last semester of education they complete. Some personnel will never use this program themselves. They may have a bachelor's degree already, or they may not desire to obtain one. However, if they can pass it to a dependent, it can still be a retention tool for them. The rules we are requesting would be the same: for every semester the dependent completes, the member must continue to serve in the Kansas National Guard for two years.

A cursory look indicates that the following states have programs similar to what we are proposing with regard to dependents and National Guard tuition assistance:

Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program
Arizona State Tuition Reimbursement Program
Arkansas Military Dependents Scholarship Program
Colorado National Guard Tuition Assistance Program
Connecticut Veterans Tuition Waiver
Georgia Hero Scholarship
Idaho National Guard Dependents' Educational Assistance Program
Illinois National Guard Grant Program
Massachusetts National Guard Family Education Program
Michigan National Guard State Tuition Assistance Program
New Hampshire National Guard Tuition Waiver Benefit
New Jersey National Guard Tuition Waiver Program
Pennsylvania National Guard Military Family Education Program
Texas Hazelwood Act
Washington National Guard Postsecondary Education Grant
Wisconsin G.I. Bill
Wyoming National Guard Educational Assistance Plan

The second part of this bill updates the Educational Master's for Enhanced Readiness and Global Excellence (EMERGE) program. This is a terrific program but as it stands only includes Master's degrees. We are seeking to expand the program to include all post-graduate degrees. There are long-standing vacancies in our formations in critically manned fields like legal and medical. The degrees required to hold these positions are not covered under the current EMERGE law; if we can update it to include advanced degrees, including in the medical and legal career fields, we can use it to put people to work in those positions. This has the potential to be one of the greatest tools we've had to build unit and individual readiness, and with your help we can do it with just a policy tweak under current funding levels.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this matter. You are always welcome to reach out to me if you need anything. You may also contact my legislative liaison, Lt. Col. Keith Marshall, at 785-646-0011 or keith.marshall.1@us.af.mil.

MICHAEL T. VENERDI
Major General, Kansas National Guard
The Adjutant General