



KANSAS ADJUTANT GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT
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Testimony on House Bill No. 2541

Amendments to the Kansas National Guard Education Assistance Act

February 8, 2018

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding HB 2541 and proposed changes to the Kansas National Guard Education Assistance Act.

I am incredibly proud of the men and women that serve in the Kansas Army and Air National Guard. They are consummate professionals and accomplish great things during these extraordinarily challenging times. They approach their responsibilities with a profound sense of duty and are fully committed to serving our communities, state, and nation. This commitment has resulted in the Kansas National Guard currently being ranked in the top ten in the nation in retaining our Soldiers and Airmen. Once they are in our formations, they find meaning and purpose in their service and enjoy standing shoulder to shoulder with their brothers and sisters in arms.

However, there is a declining percentage of the population that is both able and willing to serve. Recent analysis indicates that only about 27% of individuals age 18-24 are eligible to serve and less than 1% of youth have a propensity to serve in the National Guard without also being interested in another active or reserve component. This severely limits the pool of applicants available to fill our ranks and significantly challenges our ability to meet our recruiting needs. Even though Kansas ranks very high in retaining our Guardsmen, these disturbing trends have resulted in a 16% decrease in our strength over the last ten years and have significantly eroded our ability to protect our state and nation.

Kansas is not alone in these challenges. As they have sought to combat these trends, each of our surrounding states have taken action in recent years to improve their state funded tuition assistance programs as a way to maintain or increase their overall strength. While not all states fund their programs the same way, they all fund 100% of tuition for their Guardsmen. As a result, each of these states are at or very near 100% of their strength requirements.

HB 2541 takes vital steps to improve the effectiveness of our own program by implementing changes that maximize the impact of every state dollar, better assist our Guard members with attaining their education goals, and make the program a substantially more effective recruiting and retention tool. These changes will help ensure your Guard is ready and capable of meeting the increasing threats we face both today and in the future.

On behalf of the men and women of the Kansas National Guard, I want to express my strong support for HB 2541. I thank you for your continued support and the great honor of allowing us to protect our communities, state, and nation.

I stand ready for your questions.

Respectfully submitted by:

Maj Gen Lee E. Tafanelli
Kansas Adjutant General
8 February 2018