



ENLISTED ASSOCIATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF KANSAS

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I am CMSgt Troy Abel. I am the President Elect of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of Kansas (EANGKS). Our association is made up of, and advocates for, the current and retired enlisted members of the Kansas National Guard. We provide a resource for legislators at the state and national levels to inform them about issues affecting Kansas Guardsmen, and their families. Our association strives to provide the best possible working environment and benefits for Kansas Guardsmen. I am here today to talk about how important the State Tuition Assistance Program is to the Kansas National Guard and its members.

The Kansas National Guard is an extension of the United States Army and the United States Air Force. Kansas Guardsmen deploy to the same locations and perform the same missions throughout the world as their Active Duty counterparts, and are a key component of the National Defense Strategy. These same guardsmen also serve the Governor of Kansas which makes them truly unique. They are the soldiers and airmen who respond when the citizens of Kansas are facing times of hardship through natural disasters.

The current operations tempo throughout the world is at an all-time high. As our national defense strategy focuses both on the war on terrorism and the growing threat in the South Pacific. The resources of the Kansas National Guard are as strained as they have ever been. In addition to the demands of the Department of Defense, there is also the ongoing need for guardsmen to support the recent wildfires, floods, hurricanes, and blizzards that continue to plague our state and nation. All of these insatiable demands are coming at a time when membership in the Kansas National Guard, and in the National Guard nationwide is as low as it has been in decades. Recruiting and retention are a top priority at both the state and national levels, and one of the most effective recruiting and retention tools we have at the state level is the Tuition Assistance Program.

There are thousands of guardsmen who have used State Tuition Assistance within the Kansas National Guard. Many of them joined the guard for that reason alone. I have included a couple of testimonials from current guardsmen who fit that description:

I was born and raised in Nebraska. My father was a career Nebraska Army Guardsman, and used the majority of his GI bill to put my older sister through school. My options for college were to pay my own way or to get assistance from an outside organization (scholarship foundation, military, etc.). My father brought the Kansas Air National Guard (KSANG) to my attention at the time as it not only offered state tuition assistance, but also waved out of state tuition costs for members enlisted in Kansas. At 17, this was the sole factor which brought me into the KSANG, and in my short time I have deployed in support of a special operations joint task force, been locally mobilized to support the federal mission, and have been named the Overall Kansas National Guardsman of the year for the state of Kansas. I also graduated from Wichita State University in 2015 with Magna Cum Laude honors. SSgt Bryan Pironne, 184th IW, KSANG

While working towards the final year of my undergraduate degree at Washburn University I made the choice to enlist into the KS Air National Guard. I no longer had an athletic scholarship to help pay for supplemental school costs. I had heard the military offered great benefits for college so I contacted a recruiter. When outlining all of the benefits he informed me that members of the KS Air National Guard received state tuition assistance if attending a college within Kansas. This tuition assistance was unexpected and as a potential recruit it helped ensure confidence in my decision in joining the KSANG as the right choice. As a college student in my last two semesters of college, the in-state tuition was an exceptional benefit in ensuring my student debt was minimal once I completed my degree. The lack of school debt helped prioritize earnings towards my future home, starting a family, and contribute more towards my retirement goals at a young age. Captain Brett Starbuck, 190th ARW, KSANG

The State Tuition Assistance program is an investment in the members of the Kansas National Guard, and in turn the safety and security of the State of Kansas. It serves not only as an effective recruiting tool, but also as a means for guardsmen to better themselves through education and apply that knowledge within their duties as guardsmen. H.B. 2541 would streamline the program by ensuring a handful of members who were not eligible to receive it are covered. More importantly, it would ensure in good faith that the money allocated is available to as many members as possible by adding provisions to limit the usage by each individual guardsmen. **Therefore, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of Kansas fully supports H.B. 2541, as well as the full funding of the State Tuition Program for FY2019.**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address you today. I would also like to thank you all for your service to our great state, and your support of past and present guardsmen and their families. I will be happy to stand for questions.

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