WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §18B-4-9

§18B-4-9. Development of services and facilities for student veterans.

(a) Legislative findings. -- The Legislature finds that veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States that attend institutions of higher education in this state have many unique needs, issues and concerns that most traditional students do not have. Many of these veterans have had or will be subject to multiple deployments to active duty, including overseas deployment, resulting in challenges to their pursuit of higher education.

(b) Legislative intent. -- It is the intent of the Legislature that state institutions of higher education provide adequate services and facilities for student veterans in order to better serve their unique needs and to make West Virginia's state institutions of higher education veteran-friendly.

(c) The commission, council and each state institution of higher education shall establish and implement measures to assure that veterans enrolled in the institutions receive services and are provided facilities appropriate for their needs, that student veterans complete programs of study and earn degrees, and that the institutions become veteran-friendly by actively and effectively providing academic and social support and assistance to student veterans. The measures shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) Establishing veteran-friendly community and technical college degree programs which recognize and award academic credit toward degrees for various types of technical and vocational military training and experience;

(2) Developing policies for each state institution of higher education to grant academic credit for Armed Forces experiences;

(3) Developing programs to encourage student veterans to share their specialized experience and knowledge gained through military service by making presentations in class, public school programs and local community organizations;

(4) Establishing and sponsoring an organization for student veterans on campus and encouraging other veteran-friendly organizations;

(5) Appointing and training specific faculty within each degree program or major as liaisons and contacts for student veterans;

(6) Providing information about programs that grant credit for prior learning to student veterans and potential student veterans;

(7) Coordinating existing disability services on campus with veteran disability services available from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, other federal and state agencies, and private resources;

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(8) Designating individuals to provide financial and psychological counseling services on each campus who are trained to effectively respond to the needs of veterans and to provide services or referrals to services to fulfill these needs for student veterans, and to the extent practicable, providing those services and programs in one location;

(9) Developing training materials on responding to student veteran needs to be available for continued professional development of counselors to student veterans;

(10) Facilitating regular statewide meetings for all personnel at state institutions of higher education who regularly provide specific services to student veterans to discuss and develop best practices, exchange ideas and experiences, and hear presentations by individuals with generally accepted expertise in areas of the various needs of student veterans;

(11) Gathering data on the status of student veterans, including their graduation rates, comparing that rate with the graduation rate of other students in the institution, and reporting those results to appropriate state and federal agencies, including the West Virginia Legislature;

(12) Establishing a program to create a collaborative relationship between student veterans and alumni of the institution, and with prospective employers to facilitate and provide employment as well as social opportunities to graduating student veterans;

(13) Developing and facilitating communications between state institutions of higher education and various veteran organizations in the state to advance veteran causes that benefit student veterans; and

(14) Coordinating among all relevant departments within each state institution of higher education including but not limited to admissions, the registrar, the bursar, the veterans advocate and financial aid to ensure that relevant deadlines or time-lines are met for certifying veterans' enrollment as early as practicable to ensure that assistance is received from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) in a timely fashion. Measures to achieve greater coordination shall include but are not limited to:

(A) Identifying applicants who are veterans as early as possible;

(B) Taking affirmative steps to reach out to veteran applicants to inform them of relevant policies, time-lines or deadlines for receiving veterans assistance;

(C) Developing a communications plan between departments, applicants and students to ensure that deadlines or time-lines are being met;

(D) Developing plans to assist students when U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs benefits are not received in a timely fashion. Such plans could include forbearance of payment deadlines, short-term loans, grants, or a revolving fund.

(E) Making every effort to provide sufficient class sections to meet the needs of students for

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classes which are required for graduation, including where appropriate, giving student veterans priority registration.

(d) Veterans Advocates. -- Each state institution of higher education shall appoint or designate and train a person, preferably a veteran, to serve as a veterans advocate on its campus. The commission and council shall also provide training for veterans advocates at each of the institutions under their respective jurisdictions. The veterans advocate shall serve as the primary point of contact and campus advocate for current and prospective students who are veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States or are current members of the Armed Forces of the United States, including reserve components of the National Guard of this state or any other state. The duties and responsibilities of the veterans advocate include, but are not limited to the following:

(1) Assist and facilitate student veterans in utilizing services, resources and facilities available at the institution; and

(2) To the extent resources are available for such purposes, provide services, programs and assistance to current and prospective student veterans designed to encourage, promote and facilitate the recruitment, retention and academic success of such students.

(e) The commission and council jointly shall submit a report to the Legislature on September 1, annually, on the progress toward implementing this section.

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