

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 1779 Session of
2017

INTRODUCED BY DEASY, READSHAW, KAVULICH, KINSEY, SCHLOSSBERG,
SIMS, RAVENSTAHL, FREEMAN, SOLOMON, ROTHMAN, BARRAR, McNEILL,
V. BROWN, SCHWEYER, GOODMAN, FARRY, MATZIE, GILLEN AND ROZZI,
SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS, SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

AN ACT

1 Amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania
2 Consolidated Statutes, providing for the Combat-to-College
3 Program.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
5 hereby enacts as follows:

6 Section 1. Title 51 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated
7 Statutes is amended by adding a chapter to read:

8 CHAPTER 88

9 COMBAT-TO-COLLEGE PROGRAM

10 Sec.

11 8801. Scope of chapter.

12 8802. Definitions.

13 8803. Student veterans program.

14 8804. Requirements.

15 8805. Statewide Combat-to-College Task Force.

16 8806. Private education institutions.

17 8807. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

1 8808. Reporting provisions.

2 8809. Sunset provision.

3 § 8801. Scope of chapter.

4 This chapter relates to the Combat-to-College Program.

5 § 8802. Definitions.

6 The following words and phrases when used in this chapter
7 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
8 context clearly indicates otherwise:

9 "Active military service." Active service in any of the
10 armed services or forces of the United States or of this
11 Commonwealth.

12 "Community college." An institution established and operated
13 under Article XIX-A of the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30,
14 No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949.

15 "Department." The Department of Military and Veterans
16 Affairs of the Commonwealth.

17 "Private education institution." An institution within this
18 Commonwealth that is legally authorized to grant degrees or
19 career and technical certifications and that is not statutorily
20 established as an instrumentality of this Commonwealth nor a
21 State-related institution or community college.

22 "State higher education institution." A State system
23 institution, a State-related institution or a community college
24 located within this Commonwealth.

25 "State-related institution." A nonprofit institution that
26 meets all of the following:

27 (1) Is legally authorized to grant degrees.

28 (2) Offers needed, specified higher education services
29 in the public interest of this Commonwealth.

30 (3) Is statutorily established as an instrumentality of

1 this Commonwealth.

2 (4) Receives a direct annual Commonwealth appropriation.

3 "State system institution." A member university as provided
4 for in section 2002-A of the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30,
5 No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949.

6 "Student veteran." An individual who is attending or
7 planning to attend a State higher education institution or
8 private education institution and is serving in the United
9 States Armed Forces, including a reserve component or National
10 Guard, or has served in the United States Armed Forces,
11 including a reserve component or National Guard, and who was
12 discharged or released from service under conditions other than
13 dishonorable.

14 "Task force." The Statewide Combat-to-College Task Force
15 established under section 8805 (relating to Statewide Combat-to-
16 College Task Force).

17 § 8803. Student veterans program.

18 Each campus of a State higher education institution shall
19 provide the services and a coordinator described under section
20 8804 (relating to requirements) to help student veterans go from
21 combat to college in order to create a positive educational
22 environment for student veterans to successfully graduate from
23 universities and vocational degree programs while recognizing
24 the skills, training and experience associated with military
25 training.

26 § 8804. Requirements.

27 (a) Requirements.--Each State higher education institution
28 shall do the following:

29 (1) For a campus that is not solely online, provide a
30 centralized geographic location on campus for student

1 veterans for admissions, class registration, financial aid
2 administration and the coordinator under subsection (b) to
3 the extent that funds are available.

4 (2) Provide outreach, information and advocacy
5 assistance to student veterans to help ensure that they
6 receive reasonable accommodations for a disability under
7 Federal and State laws.

8 (3) Develop programs to provide academic and career
9 counseling specifically for student veterans that may
10 include, but not be limited to, peer mentoring and peer
11 support programs.

12 (4) Develop programs to provide reasonable access to
13 specialized mental health counseling services or resources
14 for student veterans.

15 (5) Develop job search assistance programs designed for
16 a student veteran during a student veteran's enrollment and
17 for at least two years following the student veteran's
18 graduation.

19 (6) Not charge an admissions fee or similar fee for a
20 student veteran returning to the same education institution
21 that the student veteran attended prior to mobilization.

22 (7) Provide specific information on programs developed
23 or coordinated under this chapter, and other information
24 relevant to student veterans, on the institution's publicly
25 accessible Internet website.

26 (8) Provide postsecondary credit to student veterans for
27 military training while providing active military service if
28 the American Council on Education recommends that
29 postsecondary credit should be provided for military training
30 or provide preadmission counseling to provide a prospective

1 student veteran a detailed analysis of what postsecondary
2 credit will be accepted based on the student veteran's
3 military training.

4 (9) Provide a student veteran an alternative status that
5 reflects mobilization rather than a "W" or withdrawn status
6 on a student veteran's transcript at the student veteran's
7 request if the student veteran is being called to active
8 Federal or State duty.

9 (10) Provide for community-based collaborations to allow
10 the private sector to support combat-to-college programs
11 through financial and in-kind gifts.

12 (b) Coordinator duties.--Each State higher education
13 institution shall designate a coordinator for each campus who
14 shall:

15 (1) Develop programs to promote a positive educational
16 environment for student veterans.

17 (2) Implement training programs for the staff relating
18 to identifying and assisting student veterans who may benefit
19 from the specialized services and resources developed or
20 coordinated under this chapter.

21 (3) Make recommendations to the State higher education
22 institution's administration and the task force concerning
23 ways to improve the education of student veterans.

24 (4) Coordinate access to stress management, counseling
25 programs and other resources available.

26 (5) Coordinate with the department to educate student
27 veterans about available Commonwealth programs.

28 (6) Coordinate with the United States Department of
29 Veterans Affairs to educate student veterans on available
30 Federal benefits, including work-study programs offered by

1 the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

2 (7) Coordinate activities, seminars and programs for
3 student veterans presented by veterans organizations.

4 (8) Coordinate campus activities and social events
5 designed for student veterans.

6 (9) Coordinate programs to assist student veterans in
7 locating employment and internships.

8 § 8805. Statewide Combat-to-College Task Force.

9 (a) Establishment and composition.--A Statewide Combat-to-
10 College Task Force shall be established, consisting of the
11 following members:

12 (1) Four members appointed by the Governor, one of whom
13 shall be from each of the following:

14 (i) a State system institution;

15 (ii) a State-related institution;

16 (iii) a community college; and

17 (iv) a private education institution that provides
18 services specified under section 8804 (relating to
19 requirements) to student veterans.

20 (2) One member appointed by the Governor who serves on
21 the State Veterans' Commission.

22 (3) The Chairman of the Pennsylvania Higher Education
23 Assistance Agency or a designee.

24 (4) The Secretary of Education or a designee.

25 (5) The Adjutant General or a designee.

26 (6) Three members appointed by the Governor who are
27 student veterans or former student veteran representatives.

28 (7) One Senator appointed by the President pro tempore
29 of the Senate, one Senator appointed by the Minority Leader
30 of the Senate, one member of the House of Representatives

1 appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and
2 one member of the House of Representatives appointed by the
3 Minority Leader of the House of Representatives.

4 (b) Terms.--Terms of members under subsection (a) shall be
5 as follows:

6 (1) The members under subsection (a) (1), (2), (3), (4),
7 (5) and (6) shall serve four-year terms.

8 (2) The members under subsection (a) (7) shall serve two-
9 year terms.

10 (c) Vacancies.--Any vacancy on the task force shall be
11 filled by the original appointing officer.

12 (d) Duties.--

13 (1) Assess, refine and recommend improvements for
14 outreach services to provide veterans with necessary
15 information regarding postsecondary opportunities upon return
16 from service and develop best practices to help the veterans
17 graduate from this Commonwealth's postsecondary education
18 institutions.

19 (2) Review and approve annual applications of State
20 higher education institutions that demonstrate compliance
21 with section 8804 in order to receive the "Combat-to-College
22 Certified" title.

23 (3) Review and approve annual applications from private
24 education institutions to receive a "Combat-to-College
25 Certified" title for voluntary compliance with this chapter.

26 (4) Promote partnerships with the United States
27 Department of Veterans' Affairs that help reduce out-of-
28 pocket expenses to student veterans.

29 (5) Assess gaps in student support and policy that may
30 exist at the Federal level, including the Servicemen's

1 Readjustment Act of 1944 (58 Stat. 284) and the Federal Pell
2 Grant Program, and recommend changes in the Federal Student
3 Aid programs and the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance
4 Agency's programs to develop solutions to result in
5 unfettered access to postsecondary education opportunities.

6 (6) Provide ways to easily report accurate data on the
7 use and results of the programs authorized under this
8 chapter.

9 (7) Promote partnerships to provide financial resources
10 to help enable State higher education institutions and
11 private education institutions to meet the State standards
12 authorized under this chapter.

13 (8) Receive comments and testimony from student veterans
14 and others.

15 (9) Annually report to the General Assembly on the use
16 and results of the programs described under this chapter.

17 § 8806. Private education institutions.

18 A private education institution shall be awarded an annual
19 "Combat-to-College Certified" status by the task force if the
20 private education institution voluntarily complies with State
21 standards for student veterans' programs as described in section
22 8804 (relating to requirements).

23 § 8807. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

24 (a) Department assistance.--The department may assist the
25 task force in the task force's duties.

26 (b) Funding.--The department may apply for Federal and
27 private funding for training, outreach and other expenses to
28 help enable State higher education institutions and private
29 education institutions meet the State standards authorized under
30 this chapter.

1 (c) Reports.--The department shall publish on the
2 department's publicly accessible Internet website the reports on
3 information collected under sections 8804 (relating to
4 requirements), 8805 (relating to Statewide Combat-to-College
5 Task Force), 8806 (relating to private education institutions)
6 and 8808 (relating to reporting provisions) with other
7 information the department deems useful to assist student
8 veterans.

9 § 8808. Reporting provisions.

10 Starting 90 days after the effective date of this section,
11 each State higher education institution and private education
12 institution voluntarily deemed as "Combat-to-College Certified"
13 shall annually report to the department and to the task force
14 that the State higher education institution or private education
15 institution offers the services described under section 8804
16 (relating to requirements) and the utilization and results of
17 the services authorized under this chapter.

18 § 8809. Sunset provision.

19 This chapter shall expire 15 years from the effective date of
20 this section.

21 Section 2. This act shall take effect as follows:

22 (1) Sections 8803 and 8804 of Title 51 shall take effect
23 in one year.

24 (2) The remainder of this act shall take effect in 60
25 days.