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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 1209 Session of  
2015

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INTRODUCED BY DEASY, READSHAW, COHEN, THOMAS, FREEMAN, V. BROWN,  
BISHOP, HARKINS, HANNA, YOUNGBLOOD, O'BRIEN, DAVIDSON, MURT,  
KORTZ, BIZZARRO, RAVENSTAHL, McNEILL, GOODMAN, SCHLOSSBERG,  
SCHWEYER, BARBIN, CONKLIN, D. COSTA, GIBBONS, BROWNLIEE, SIMS,  
ROZZI AND McCARTER, MAY 13, 2015

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS, MAY 13, 2015

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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. Short title 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.

1 8807. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

2 8808. Reporting provisions.

3 8809. Sunset provision.

4 § 8801. Short title of chapter.

5 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the Combat-  
6 to-College Program.

7 § 8802. Definitions.

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

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

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

17 "Department." The Department of Military and Veterans  
18 Affairs.

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

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

27 "State-related institution." Classification of a nonprofit  
28 institution which is legally authorized to grant degrees, offers  
29 needed, specified higher education services in the public  
30 interest of the Commonwealth, is statutorily established as an

1 instrumentality of this Commonwealth and receives a direct  
2 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." Any person who is attending or planning  
7 to attend a State higher education institution or private  
8 education institution and is serving in the United States Armed  
9 Forces, including a reserve component or National Guard, or  
10 served in the United States Armed Forces, including a reserve  
11 component or National Guard, and who was discharged or released  
12 from service under conditions other than dishonorable.

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

16 § 8803. Student veterans program.

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

25 § 8804. Requirements.

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

28 (1) For a campus that is not solely online, provide a  
29 centralized geographic location on campus for student  
30 veterans for admissions, class registration, financial aid

1 administration and the coordinator under subsection (b) to  
2 the extent that funds are available.

3 (2) Provide outreach, information and advocacy  
4 assistance to student veterans to help ensure that they  
5 receive reasonable accommodations for any disability pursuant  
6 to the laws of the United States and this Commonwealth.

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

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

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

18 (6) Not charge an admissions or similar fee for student  
19 veterans returning to the same education institution which  
20 they attended prior to mobilization.

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

25 (8) Provide postsecondary credit to student veterans for  
26 military training while serving in the armed forces or  
27 National Guard if the American Council on Education  
28 recommends that postsecondary credit should be provided for  
29 military training or provide preadmission counseling to  
30 provide a prospective student veteran a detailed analysis of

1 what postsecondary credit will be accepted based on the  
2 student veteran's military training.

3 (9) Provide student veterans an alternative status that  
4 reflects mobilization rather than a "W" or withdrawn status  
5 on student veterans' transcripts at the student veteran's  
6 request in the event of a student veteran being called to  
7 active Federal or State duty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 § 8805. Statewide Combat-to-College Task Force.

8       (a) Establishment and composition.--A Statewide Combat-to-  
9 College Task Force shall be established, consisting of 15  
10 members serving four-year terms which shall include:

11       (1) Four members appointed by the Governor, one of whom  
12 shall be from a State system institution, one of whom shall  
13 be from a State-related institution, one of whom shall be  
14 from a community college and one of whom shall be from a  
15 private education institution that provides services  
16 specified in section 8804 (relating to requirements) to its  
17 student veterans.

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

20       (3) The Chairman of the Pennsylvania Higher Education  
21 Assistance Agency or his designee.

22       (4) The Secretary of Education or his designee.

23       (5) The Adjutant General or his designee.

24       (6) Three members appointed by the Governor who are  
25 student veteran or former student veteran representatives.

26       (7) One Senator appointed for a two-year term by the  
27 President pro tempore of the Senate and one Senator appointed  
28 for a two-year term by the Minority Leader of the Senate, one  
29 member of the House of Representatives appointed for a two-  
30 year term by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and

1 one member of the House of Representatives appointed for a  
2 two-year term by the Minority Leader of the House of  
3 Representatives.

4 (b) Vacancies.--Any vacancy on the task force shall be  
5 filled by the original appointing officer.

6 (c) Duties.--

7 (1) Assess, refine and recommend improvements for  
8 outreach services to provide veterans with necessary  
9 information regarding postsecondary opportunities upon return  
10 from service and develop best practices to help them graduate  
11 from this Commonwealth's postsecondary education  
12 institutions.

13 (2) Review and approve annual applications of State  
14 higher education institutions that demonstrate compliance  
15 with section 8804 in order to receive the "Combat-to-College  
16 Certified" title.

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

20 (4) Promote partnerships with the Veterans'  
21 Administration that help reduce out-of-pocket expenses to  
22 student veterans.

23 (5) Assess gaps in student support and policy that may  
24 exist at the Federal level, including the Government Issued  
25 (GI) Bill and the Pell Grant Program, and recommend changes  
26 in the Federal and State higher education financial  
27 assistance programs to develop solutions to result in  
28 unfettered access to postsecondary education opportunities.

29 (6) Provide ways to easily report accurate data on the  
30 use and results of the programs authorized by this chapter.

1       (7) Promote partnerships to provide financial resources  
2 to help enable State higher education institutions and  
3 private education institutions to meet the State standards  
4 authorized in this chapter.

5       (8) Receive comments and testimony from student veterans  
6 and others.

7       (9) Annually report to the General Assembly on the use  
8 and results of the programs described in this chapter.

9 § 8806. Private education institutions.

10 A private education institution shall be awarded an annual  
11 "Combat-to-College Certified" status by the task force if the  
12 private education institution voluntarily complies with State  
13 standards for student veterans' programs as described in section  
14 8804 (relating to requirements).

15 § 8807. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

16 (a) Department assistance.--The department is authorized to  
17 assist the task force in its duties.

18 (b) Funding.--The department is authorized to apply for  
19 Federal and private funding for training, outreach and other  
20 expenses to help enable State higher education institutions and  
21 private education institutions meet the State standards  
22 authorized in this chapter.

23 (c) Reports.--The department shall publish on its Internet  
24 website the reports on information collected pursuant to  
25 sections 8804 (relating to requirements), 8805 (relating to  
26 Statewide Combat-to-College Task Force), 8806 (relating to  
27 private education institutions) and 8808 (relating to reporting  
28 provisions) along with any other information it deems useful to  
29 assist student veterans.

30 § 8808. Reporting provisions.

1 Starting 90 days after the effective date of this chapter,  
2 every State higher education institution and private education  
3 institution voluntarily certified as "Combat-to-College" shall  
4 annually report to the department and to the task force on  
5 whether they offer the services described in section 8804  
6 (relating to requirements) and the utilization and results of  
7 the services authorized by this chapter.

8 § 8809. Sunset provision.

9 This chapter shall sunset 15 years from the effective date of  
10 this chapter.

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

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

14 (2) The remainder of this act shall take effect in 60  
15 days.