



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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**Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee
June 6, 2016
Assembly Bill No. 375**

Good Morning Madam Chair and Members of the Committee.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify today on Assembly Bill No. 375 which would require institutions of higher education to provide greater assistance to certain students with military obligations.

The state colleges and universities are proud to provide educational opportunities to military and veteran students. Military-affiliated students are thriving on our campuses, in large part to the commitment our institutions have made to adapt to their unique needs. Although we agree with the intent of the bill, which is to provide assistance and support to our military students, we must raise concerns we have with specific language in the bill.

Section 2 speaks to the establishment of “policies and procedures to assist a student enrolled in the institutions each semester.” Our member institutions have implemented such policies and work hard to ensure that those who self-identify are made aware of programs, services and accommodations that are in place for them. The concern is those students who choose not to identify their military status. The practicality of providing this information to those who have not self-identified is cumbersome at best and not doing so would in effect put schools in a position of non-compliance.

In Section 3, the issues regarding course interruptions resulting from military service and academic obligation are best handled at the departmental level, rather than with individual faculty members. Moreover, the language which requires a contract between the faculty member and the student is troubling. Although the intent is to protect the student, it could have the unintended consequence of hurting the student if he or she is unable to meet the requirements to which they have agreed. This reinforces our position that the agreement between the student and the institution should be handled by the department and should be an informal agreement so that both parties can be flexible and respond to unforeseen circumstances in the future.

In Section 4, the awarding of a maximum of 30 credits is mandated for all public and independent institutions. Currently, almost all the NJASCU schools are members of the Servicemembers Opportunity Consortium and such they are following the recommended guidelines to evaluate each student’s transcript consistent with his or her degree plan. Some institutions are even exceeding the 30 credit limit that this legislation would impose. We see no reason to cap this credit amount should circumstances permit the awarding of a greater amount. The state colleges and universities support the credit language which is in S-2202(SCS). This language is consistent with the current practice at the institutions regarding credit to military and veterans and allows the institutions to award as many credits as they decide are merited.

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*The College of New Jersey
Kean University
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Rowan University*

*Stockton University
Thomas Edison State University
William Paterson University*

Finally, we request that the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education be the agency overseeing the implementation of this legislation, as Department of Military and Veterans Affairs does not have the necessary expertise in higher education issues.

While we wholeheartedly support the enactment of any provisions that greatly enhance the educational opportunities of our military-affiliated student population, we would ask that you consider these provisions that may have unintended consequences.