



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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Senate Higher Education Committee

February 8, 2016

Senate Bill No. 128

Good Morning Madam Chair and Members of the Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill No. 128 which would require institutions of higher education to provide greater assistance to certain students with military obligations.

As you may be aware, the nine member institutions of the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities have made serving our military a top priority since founding Operation College Promise (OCP) in 2008. OCP was established by our nine state colleges to assist college personnel support military-affiliated students "To, Through and Beyond" their higher education objectives. Through a blend of educational, research and policy initiatives, the program has disseminated promising practices to over 500 professionals in about 40 states. This mission, to give back to those who have worn the uniform, has been a big part of the Association's agenda for the past five years.

Military-affiliated students are thriving on our campuses, in large part to the commitment our institutions have made to adapt to their unique needs. The language in S-128 is intended to gear up these efforts through several provisions and I would like to raise several concerns.

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.

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.

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

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