



DATE: September 15, 2020

TO: House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee, Senate Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee and the Legislative Administrator

FROM: Kelly Fitzpatrick, Director

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Executive Summary: Implementation of HB 2201 (2019), Establishing the Veteran Educational Bridge Grant

Overview

Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) submits this report on the implementation and current status of HB 2201 (2019). This legislation created the Veterans Educational Bridge Grant (VEBG) Program and required ODVA to submit a Legislative Report by September 15, 2020, to provide the status of the Program.

Purpose and Eligibility

The VEBG provides grants to eligible student veterans to alleviate the financial hardship created during a period when required courses are unavailable, allowing them to stay in school and finish their academic program. Completion of academic programs aids veterans' successful transition to civilian careers and into their community.

Under the program, eligible student veterans who are unable to complete their education due to the unavailability of required classes may receive grants of up to \$5,000 over the course of a lifetime. Applicants must meet eligibility requirements before a grant is awarded. To be eligible, the applicant must be a veteran, eligible for GI Bill® benefits, an Oregon resident, and enrolled in an Oregon-based academic program that is approved by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Veteran Educational Bridge Grant Program Data

The VEBG was implemented and is administered by ODVA's VEBG Coordinator, hired in January 2020. ODVA began taking applications in May 2020, and as of September 13, 2020, the grant program has been in place for 17 weeks.

ODVA was allocated \$300,000 to distribute to student veterans. Grant award amounts were based on demonstrated financial need during the period of program delay. As of September 1, 2020, the VEBG has:

- Received 39 applications.
- Awarded 37 grants and rejected 2 applications.
- Awarded an average of \$4,727 per grant.
- Awarded a total of \$179,342 in grant funds.
- A remainder of \$120,658, as of September 1, 2020.
- A five-day average turnaround time from receipt of application to issuance of grant funds.

All the student veterans served by the VEBG are in high-demand programs and have skills that can be immediately utilized in the labor market. The grant has served veterans enrolled in flight programs, apprenticeships, culinary arts degrees, MBA programs, massage therapy training, and healthcare programs.

Every student veteran served has displayed exemplary academic achievement, demonstrated by a reported GPA of 3.46 or higher. Every applicant has had their academic progress interrupted due to the COVID-19 virus, and their programs have components that do not translate into distance learning. For example, flight labs, in-class skill learning for apprentices, and externships had all been canceled. These student veterans see an average delay of 4.45 months in their projected program completion date.

Conclusion

The Veteran Educational Bridge Grant has had a beneficial impact on student veterans whose academic programs have been affected by the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis, probably making the difference between whether a student

veteran continues their academic program or quits. ODVA anticipates some level of need is likely to continue into 2021 as the nation continues to confront the virus, and academic institutions determine how they will meet students' educational needs going forward amid the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Full report: <https://www.oregon.gov/odva/Connect/Pages/Reports.aspx>
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