

SS HB 1678 -- MILITARY FAMILIES, TUITION GRANTS FOR VETERANS' SURVIVORS, AND INTERSTATE COMPACT EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR MILITARY CHILDREN

This bill changes the laws regarding members of the military and their families. In its main provisions, the bill:

- (1) Adds the chairman of the Missouri Veterans Commission to the Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission and clarifies that the commission's duties include developing policies and methods to improve the prosperity and employment opportunities of retired military members and the families of former military members;
- (2) Specifies that the chair of the Missouri Military Preparedness and Enhancement Commission will be an ex officio member of the Missouri Veterans Commission and the enhancement commission will help veterans who are legal residents of Missouri;
- (3) Allows a military dependent who has completed an accredited prekindergarten or kindergarten program in another state to enter kindergarten or first grade even if the child has not reached the required age for Missouri schools by August 1;
- (4) Authorizes the State Board of Education to develop recommendations regarding alternate assessments for military dependents who relocate to Missouri during the school year;
- (5) Requires the state board to establish a rule to allow the issuance of a provisional teacher's certificate before the completion of a background check to the spouse of a military member who holds a teacher's certificate in another state that requires a background check and who has relocated within the last year;
- (6) Allows school districts to accept a course in government completed in another state when a student transfers to a Missouri high school in ninth to twelfth grade to satisfy the state's graduation requirement;
- (7) Allows the spouse and children of a soldier who was killed in action after September 11, 2001, or who became 80% disabled as the result of an injury sustained in combat action after September 11, 2001, to receive an educational grant for tuition at a public or private college or university in Missouri. The Coordinating Board of Higher Education will award up to 25 grants annually. If the waiting list of eligible survivors exceeds 50, the board can ask the General Assembly to increase the number of grants it is authorized to award. The tuition grant cannot

exceed what is charged for a resident by the University of Missouri-Columbia. The veteran must have been a Missouri resident when first entering military service or at the time of death in order for his or her survivors to receive this grant. In addition to the full cost of tuition, the grant includes \$2,000 per semester for room and board and the actual cost of books up to \$500 per semester. Children are eligible to receive the scholarship until age 25. Spouses are eligible until age 45. No eligible student will receive a grant for more than 100% of the tuition costs when combined with other similar funds given to the student;

(8) Renames the Guard at Home Program to the Hero at Home Program and extends the program to cover the first year after discharge from deployment, to cover reservists, and to cover situations in which an individual cannot return to his or her previous employment;

(9) Specifies that military service and out-of-state employment, by itself, is not sufficient to justify a modification of a child custody or visitation order; and

(10) Authorizes Missouri to enter into the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children and establishes the Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The compact becomes effective upon its adoption by 10 states. Military children include the kindergarten through twelfth-grade children of active duty members of the armed services including the National Guard and the reserve, as well as the children of members who die while on active duty, retire, or are medically discharged for a period of one year afterward. The compact covers issues including facilitation of enrollment, both in classes and extracurricular activities; placement; graduation; and information-sharing. The commission is made up of one voting member from each participating state. The duties of the commission include dispute resolution between member states, enforcing the rules of the commission, and providing training and other administrative functions. The bill contains provisions for the formation of the commission's executive committee, budget, liability, and legal status.

The provisions of the bill regarding tuition grants will expire six years from the effective date.