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Brigadier General Michael T. Venerdi
The Adjutant General and Director of
Emergency Management & Homeland Security

Laura Kelly, Governor

January 29, 2024

Committee on Education
Kansas House of Representatives
Attn: Representative Adam Thomas, Chairman
Cc: Diane Bernheimer, Committee Assistant
State Capitol, Room 218-N
300 SW 10th Ave
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Chairman Thomas and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the following perspective on House Bill No. 2567. Lt. Col. Keith Marshall, my legislative liaison, will testify on my behalf.

The Adjutant General's Department provides neutral testimony on HB 2567. We are offering neutral testimony because this is not one of my top three priorities for this legislative session, and the bill did not originate from our agency.

However, if the Legislature desires to create and fund this program, it would be a benefit to the Kansas National Guard and its soldiers and airmen. Tuition assistance is a very popular program in the Kansas National Guard, with members utilizing \$4,946,352 in benefits in calendar year 2023. However, the current tuition assistance program only covers bachelor's degrees. The Kansas National Guard has 1,291 personnel who have a bachelor's degree but not yet a master's degree, which would be the primary pool of eligible members for this proposed benefit.

For decades, education benefits have been noted in surveys as one of the top three reasons people join the military. Tuition Assistance is a key component in education benefits, and it works in concert with the Montgomery GI Bill to provide the education our servicemembers desire. Many factors contribute to Tuition Assistance being the education benefit of choice for our members. First, many Guardsmen do not qualify for the GI Bill, as there is a requirement to have served on Active Duty for at least 90 days in order to qualify.ⁱ Second, according to a study of education benefits by the RAND Corporation, the GI Bill is designed to be used by full-time students.ⁱⁱ Most of our Guardsmen are not full-time students; they work full-time jobs, serve in the National Guard, and would like to continue their education in addition to that. The GI bill is also designed to provide the maximum financial benefit to those who have separated from military service, rather than those who are currently serving. In many instances such as these, Tuition Assistance is a much better program for Guardsmen than the GI Bill.

The same study by RAND indicates important trends between education benefits and recruiting and retention. First, unsurprisingly, education benefits drive higher numbers of recruits. Second, the lure of education benefits drives a higher quality of recruits when it comes to higher ASVAB scores of those entering the service. Finally, with respect to retention, Tuition Assistance can only be used

while members are still serving. It also includes a service commitment once the education benefits are utilized, creating a strong retention incentive.

This bill appears to create a valuable tool in recruiting and retention for the Kansas National Guard. The current end strength of the Kansas Army National Guard is 97.4%, and the Kansas Air National Guard is 92.9%. Any tool to increase those numbers is a benefit to the Kansas National Guard and its readiness to respond to state missions across Kansas and federal missions around the world.

In closing, education has been an important piece of military excellence for centuries. Thucydides is quoted as saying, "The nation that makes a great distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools." Something that sets the United States military apart from its enemies is a commitment to education throughout our force. Our warriors are also scholars, and the Kansas National Guard represents the best of that tradition. We thank you for your support in that endeavor!

You are always welcome to reach out to me if you need anything. You may also contact my legislative liaison, Lt. Col. Keith Marshall, at 785-646-0011 or keith.marshall.1@us.af.mil.

MICHAEL T. VENERDI
Brigadier General, Kansas National Guard
The Adjutant General

ⁱ <https://www.va.gov/education/eligibility/>

ⁱⁱ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1766.html