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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 199 Session of  
2023

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INTRODUCED BY DEASY, HILL-EVANS, MADDEN, CIRESI, SANCHEZ, RABB,  
HOWARD, D. WILLIAMS AND N. NELSON, MARCH 8, 2023

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS, MARCH 8, 2023

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AN ACT

1 Amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania  
2 Consolidated Statutes, providing for the Combat-to-college  
3 Program.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
5 hereby enacts as follows:

6 Section 1. Title 51 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated  
7 Statutes is amended by adding a chapter to read:

8 CHAPTER 88

9 COMBAT-TO-COLLEGE PROGRAM

10 Sec.

11 8801. Scope of chapter.

12 8802. Definitions.

13 8803. Student veterans program.

14 8804. Requirements.

15 8805. Statewide Combat-to-college Task Force.

16 8806. Private education institutions.

17 8807. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

18 8808. Reporting provisions.

1 8809. Expiration.

2 § 8801. Scope of chapter.

3 This chapter relates to the Combat-to-college Program.

4 § 8802. Definitions.

5 The following words and phrases when used in this chapter  
6 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
7 context clearly indicates otherwise:

8 "Active military service." Active service in any of the  
9 armed services or armed forces of the United States or of this  
10 Commonwealth.

11 "Community college." An institution established and operated  
12 under Article XIX-A of the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30,  
13 No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949.

14 "Department." The Department of Military and Veterans  
15 Affairs of the Commonwealth.

16 "Private education institution." An institution within this  
17 Commonwealth that is legally authorized to grant degrees or  
18 career and technical certifications and that is not statutorily  
19 established as an instrumentality of this Commonwealth nor a  
20 State-related institution or community college.

21 "State institution of higher education." A State system  
22 institution, a State-related institution or a community college  
23 located within this Commonwealth.

24 "State-related institution." A nonprofit institution that  
25 meets all of the following:

26 (1) Is legally authorized to grant degrees.

27 (2) Offers needed, specified higher education services  
28 in the public interest of this Commonwealth.

29 (3) Is statutorily established as an instrumentality of  
30 this Commonwealth.

1           (4) Receives a direct annual Commonwealth appropriation.  
2           "State system institution." A member university as provided  
3 for in section 2002-A of the Public School Code of 1949.

4           "Student veteran." An individual who is attending or  
5 planning to attend a State institution of higher education or  
6 private education institution and is serving in the United  
7 States Armed Forces, including a reserve component or National  
8 Guard, or has served in the United States Armed Forces,  
9 including a reserve component or National Guard, and who was  
10 discharged or released from service under conditions other than  
11 dishonorable.

12           "Task force." The Statewide Combat-to-college Task Force  
13 established under section 8805 (relating to Statewide Combat-to-  
14 college Task Force).

15 § 8803. Student veterans program.

16           Each campus of a State institution of higher education shall  
17 provide the services and a coordinator described under section  
18 8804 (relating to requirements) to help student veterans go from  
19 combat to college in order to create a positive educational  
20 environment for student veterans to successfully graduate from  
21 universities and vocational degree programs while recognizing  
22 the skills, training and experience associated with military  
23 training.

24 § 8804. Requirements.

25           (a) Requirements.--Each State institution of higher  
26 education shall do the following:

27           (1) For a campus that is not solely online, provide a  
28 centralized geographic location on campus for student  
29 veterans for admissions, class registration, financial aid  
30 administration and the coordinator under subsection (b) to

1 the extent that money is available.

2 (2) Provide outreach, information and advocacy  
3 assistance to student veterans to help ensure that student  
4 veterans receive reasonable accommodations for a disability  
5 under Federal and State laws.

6 (3) Develop programs to provide academic and career  
7 counseling specifically for student veterans that may  
8 include, but not be limited to, peer mentoring and peer  
9 support programs.

10 (4) Develop programs to provide reasonable access to  
11 specialized mental health counseling services or resources  
12 for student veterans.

13 (5) Develop job search assistance programs designed for  
14 a student veteran during a student veteran's enrollment and  
15 for at least two years following the student veteran's  
16 graduation.

17 (6) Not charge an admissions fee or similar fee for a  
18 student veteran returning to the same education institution  
19 that the student veteran attended prior to mobilization.

20 (7) Provide specific information on programs developed  
21 or coordinated under this chapter and other information  
22 relevant to student veterans on the institution's publicly  
23 accessible Internet website.

24 (8) Provide postsecondary credit to student veterans for  
25 military training while providing active military service if  
26 the American Council on Education recommends that  
27 postsecondary credit should be provided for military training  
28 or provide preadmission counseling to provide a prospective  
29 student veteran a detailed analysis of what postsecondary  
30 credit will be accepted based on the student veteran's

1 military training.

2 (9) Provide a student veteran an alternative status that  
3 reflects mobilization rather than a "W" or withdrawn status  
4 on a student veteran's transcript at the student veteran's  
5 request if the student veteran is being called to active  
6 Federal or State duty.

7 (10) Provide for community-based collaborations to allow  
8 the private sector to support combat-to-college programs  
9 through financial and in-kind gifts.

10 (b) Coordinator duties.--Each State institution of higher  
11 education shall designate a coordinator for each campus who  
12 shall:

13 (1) Develop programs to promote a positive educational  
14 environment for student veterans.

15 (2) Implement training programs for the staff relating  
16 to identifying and assisting student veterans who may benefit  
17 from the specialized services and resources developed or  
18 coordinated under this chapter.

19 (3) Make recommendations to the State institution of  
20 higher education's administration and the task force  
21 concerning ways to improve the education of student veterans.

22 (4) Coordinate access to stress management, counseling  
23 programs and other resources available.

24 (5) Coordinate with the department to educate student  
25 veterans about available Commonwealth programs.

26 (6) Coordinate with the United States Department of  
27 Veterans Affairs to educate student veterans on available  
28 Federal benefits, including work-study programs offered by  
29 the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

30 (7) Coordinate activities, seminars and programs for

1 student veterans presented by veterans organizations.

2 (8) Coordinate campus activities and social events  
3 designed for student veterans.

4 (9) Coordinate programs to assist student veterans in  
5 locating employment and internships.

6 § 8805. Statewide Combat-to-college Task Force.

7 (a) Establishment and composition.--A Statewide Combat-to-  
8 college Task Force shall be established, consisting of the  
9 following members:

10 (1) Four members appointed by the Governor, one of whom  
11 shall be from each of the following:

12 (i) a State system institution;

13 (ii) a State-related institution;

14 (iii) a community college; and

15 (iv) a private education institution that provides  
16 services specified under section 8804 (relating to  
17 requirements) to student veterans.

18 (2) One member appointed by the Governor who serves on  
19 the State Veterans' Commission.

20 (3) The Chairman of the Pennsylvania Higher Education  
21 Assistance Agency or a designee.

22 (4) The Secretary of Education or a designee.

23 (5) The Adjutant General or a designee.

24 (6) Three members appointed by the Governor who are  
25 student veterans or former student veteran representatives.

26 (7) One Senator appointed by the President pro tempore  
27 of the Senate, one Senator appointed by the Minority Leader  
28 of the Senate, one member of the House of Representatives  
29 appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and  
30 one member of the House of Representatives appointed by the

1 Minority Leader of the House of Representatives.

2 (b) Terms.--Terms of members under subsection (a) shall be  
3 as follows:

4 (1) The members under subsection (a)(1), (2), (3), (4),  
5 (5) and (6) shall serve four-year terms.

6 (2) The members under subsection (a)(7) shall serve two-  
7 year terms.

8 (c) Vacancies.--A vacancy on the task force shall be filled  
9 by the original appointing officer.

10 (d) Duties.--The task force shall have the following duties:

11 (1) Assess, refine and recommend improvements for  
12 outreach services to provide veterans with necessary  
13 information regarding postsecondary opportunities upon return  
14 from service and develop best practices to help veterans  
15 graduate from this Commonwealth's postsecondary education  
16 institutions.

17 (2) Review and approve annual applications of State  
18 institutions of higher education that demonstrate compliance  
19 with section 8804 in order to receive the "Combat-to-college  
20 Certified" title.

21 (3) Review and approve annual applications from private  
22 education institutions to receive a "Combat-to-college  
23 Certified" title for voluntary compliance with this chapter.

24 (4) Promote partnerships with the United States  
25 Department of Veterans Affairs that help reduce out-of-pocket  
26 expenses to student veterans.

27 (5) Assess gaps in student support and policy that may  
28 exist at the Federal level and recommend changes in the  
29 Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency's programs to  
30 develop solutions that result in unfettered access to

1 postsecondary education opportunities.

2 (6) Provide ways to easily report accurate data on the  
3 use and results of the programs authorized under this  
4 chapter.

5 (7) Promote partnerships to provide financial resources  
6 to help enable State institutions of higher education and  
7 private education institutions to meet the State standards  
8 authorized under this chapter.

9 (8) Receive comments and testimony from student veterans  
10 and others.

11 (9) Annually report to the General Assembly on the use  
12 and results of the programs described under this chapter.

13 § 8806. Private education institutions.

14 A private education institution shall be awarded an annual  
15 "Combat-to-college Certified" status by the task force if the  
16 private education institution voluntarily complies with State  
17 standards for student veterans' programs as described in section  
18 8804 (relating to requirements).

19 § 8807. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

20 (a) Department assistance.--The department may assist the  
21 task force in the task force's duties.

22 (b) Funding.--The department may apply for Federal and  
23 private funding for training, outreach and other expenses to  
24 help enable State institutions of higher education and private  
25 education institutions to meet the State standards authorized  
26 under this chapter.

27 (c) Reports.--The department shall publish on the  
28 department's publicly accessible Internet website the reports on  
29 information collected under sections 8804 (relating to  
30 requirements), 8805 (relating to Statewide Combat-to-college



1 Task Force), 8806 (relating to private education institutions)  
2 and 8808 (relating to reporting provisions) with other  
3 information the department deems useful to assist student  
4 veterans.

5 § 8808. Reporting provisions.

6 Beginning 90 days after the effective date of this section,  
7 each State institution of higher education and private education  
8 institution voluntarily deemed as "Combat-to-college Certified"  
9 shall annually report to the department and to the task force  
10 that the State institution of higher education or private  
11 education institution offers the services described under  
12 section 8804 (relating to requirements) and the utilization and  
13 results of the services authorized under this chapter.

14 § 8809. Expiration.

15 This chapter shall expire 15 years from the effective date of  
16 this section.

17 Section 2. This act shall take effect as follows:

18 (1) The addition of 51 Pa.C.S. §§ 8803 and 8804 shall  
19 take effect in one year.

20 (2) This section shall take effect immediately.

21 (3) The remainder of this act shall take effect in 60  
22 days.