

TESTIMONY OF
BRIGADIER GENERAL JACKIE HUBER
NORTH DAKOTA NATIONAL GUARD
BEFORE THE
SENATE APPROPRIATIONS – EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT
27 JANUARY 2023
SENATE BILL 2094

Greetings, Chairman Sorvaag and members of the committee, I am Jackie Huber, Deputy Adjutant General for the North Dakota National Guard (NDNG). I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 2094. This bill proposes to establish a new section of law 37-07.2 and would grant eligibility for North Dakota National Guard Members State Tuition Assistance (STA) beyond the boundaries of North Dakota. There are 619 NDNG members that live in surrounding states, of which 561 (91%) live in Minnesota.

The North Dakota National Guard met recruiting goals in 2020 and 2021 but we fell short in 2022 and are projected to fall short again in 2023. There are various circumstances as to why this is occurring, but a contributing factor is that North Dakota is at a competitive disadvantage to other states when providing education assistance to its members. We are in direct competition for recruits with surrounding states, particularly Minnesota and we feel that establishment of 37-07.2 is necessary to be competitive.

The North Dakota National Guard's number one recruiting tool is education benefits. Approximately, 80% of recruits have stated that it is a primary reason for them joining the National Guard. NDNG members leverage federal education benefits like Federal Tuition Assistance and the GI Bill. Presently, the Air National Guard does not have a Federal Tuition Assistance Program. The state and federal programs are generally used in combination to provide the best benefit to the service member with STA being applied last to leverage the federal dollars before applying state dollars.

Currently, STA is authorized for use at public and private colleges only in North Dakota. Our recommendation of SB 2094 would allow members of the North Dakota National Guard attending college outside of North Dakota, to receive STA, like the current practice of our most direct competition. Currently any member of the Minnesota National Guard that attends a North Dakota college receives state tuition reimbursement from Minnesota, but a member of the North Dakota National Guard attending an out of state college is not afforded that same benefit.

Each semester, on average 450 NDNG service members request STA, which expends approximately \$2.7M of our \$3M general fund base budget. Our estimates for NDNG members that already attend out of state schools, either resident or on-line, is roughly 60-120. The annual estimated number of recruits lost to our competition is between 25-54. Our most up to date projections estimate the STA program could expand to schools outside of ND as a nearly budget neutral program in the 2023-25 biennium given our base budget of \$3M and carry-over request in the agency's executive recommendation of \$1.7M.

In this highly competitive environment, we need to be just as supportive of our members as our competition. I ask for your support of SB 2094 and will stand by for any questions that you may have.