

February 3, 2017

**Testimony before the House General, Housing & Military Affairs Committee on H.72,
An act relating to the Vermont National Guard Educational Assistance Program**

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The Chancellor and the five colleges of the Vermont State Colleges System are proud to support the Vermont National Guard and the hundreds of military-connected students currently enrolled in our programs. National Guard, active duty military and over 600 veteran students contribute significantly to our academic communities.

The Vermont State Colleges have campuses, learning centers, and distance learning sites across the state and online, and are well-poised to serve Guard members wherever they are serving in Vermont. Currently, our colleges serve the majority of Guard members taking advantage of the VSAC loan benefit, having enrolled 30 of the 46 National Guard students attending public colleges or universities in Vermont. We are prepared not only to enroll more Guard members, but also to support their success in the classroom.

The tuition benefit is significant for the Guard, both as a recruiting and retention tool, but also as a means for increasing the educational attainment of its members. The Guard has also reported in testimony that this bill may incentivize more young people to earn a degree, and to stay and work in Vermont.

We understand that this bill is modeled on programs in other New England states, including Maine and New Hampshire, that offer tuition benefits at their public higher education institutions. These programs, and others, are funded by their respective States.

We are pleased to endorse a tuition benefit for the Vermont National Guard that is fully funded by the State.

The Vermont State Colleges enroll over 10,000 Vermonters annually, and serve an additional 9,000 in our workforce and continuing education programs. Our mission to serve the State is our priority, and so we are pleased to partner with VSAC, the Vermont National Guard, and the State on this initiative.