



CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE

TESTIMONY TO SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE ON H.72

David Boyle
Veteran and Military Services Program Manager
Champlain College

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As a 26-year veteran of the Vermont Army National Guard and the current Veteran and Military Services Program Manager at Champlain College, I would like to voice my support of H.72. I believe it is what the the women and men of the VTNG deserve for the sacrifices they make on our behalf and is the least we can do to honor their service.

I also believe benefits should include a provision for Guard members to have access to the full range of educational opportunities available here in Vermont, including private institutions. Knowing that funding is an issue statewide, I would not want the issue of the private school provision to jeopardize the bill. However, private institutions of higher education have, for years, looked for ways to make a college education affordable for members of our VTNG. So, if there is a way to fund the private school provision in H.72, here are some things to keep in mind.

At the heart of this matter is choice. It is important for National Guard members to have a choice in selecting higher educational opportunities that work for them and their families. Many of those currently serving in the VTNG are adult learners, with families, full-time jobs, and all of the responsibilities and distractions that come with adulthood. In addition, not all new recruits are college-ready when they join and may choose to defer their education to a later time. I know this because I was that young kid who joined not knowing what he wanted to do with his life. It wasn't until a few years into my military career that I realized I wanted to get an education, but by that time I had a wife, a young daughter, a mortgage, a full-time job and a whole lot more responsibility. I attained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree through unconventional means, taking classes online and at night. Private institutions were key in attaining my educational goals.

National Guard members should be able to choose academic program offerings that meet their interests and career aspirations, as well as their preferred mode of delivery. Private schools offer flexibility and course diversity that state schools can't always offer. For example, we've had National Guard students enrolled in Computer Game Programming -- the only program of its kind in the state. VSC offers online education, but pales in comparison to the number of degree



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programs that schools like Champlain offer particularly in high-growth fields like cybersecurity, where there are currently more than 300 unfilled jobs in Vermont due to a shortage of skilled, college-prepared workers. Champlain's 60+ online degree programs are terrific options for Guard members. It would be unfortunate if students chose to leave Vermont for neighboring states because they were not able to access the programs of their choice here in Vermont.

The commitment to the VTNG among private colleges in Vermont is strong. As that young student, I discovered first-hand the commitment that private schools in Vermont made to military service members. Were it not for the Buxton Scholarship that St. Michael's College offered to VTNG members, I would not have been able to go to school and complete a master's degree. St. Michael's continues to offer the Buxton Scholarship and Norwich University also offers a reduced tuition rate to military members.

Champlain College has a strong commitment to supporting our nation's military personnel, including members of the Vermont National Guard. Champlain already provides Vermont National Guard students with an education that is less expensive than the published rate for state colleges. The cost of a degree is significantly lower for both students and the state.

- Champlain spends \$818,130 annually in institutional aid to support veteran and military service members pursuing their education at Champlain. This includes \$568k in institutional scholarships and \$250k to support our portion of the Yellow Ribbon program.
- Last year, Champlain created new military pricing for our online programs with significant discounts for service members, their spouses, and adult children. This means National Guard members are able to pursue an undergraduate degree or certificate at Champlain College for just \$250 per credit (and \$268 per credit for military dependents), as well a graduate degree at only \$398 per credit. The savings for the members and their families is substantial at up to 50% off our standard "rack rate" depending upon the program selected.
- The total tuition cost for a Vermont National Guard member to complete a bachelor's degree is \$250 per credit, which at 120 credits totals \$30,000—less than the cost of one year of tuition at many other institutions.
- Champlain's enrollment of National Guard members has increased each year -- currently, we have 20 undergraduates and 8 graduates enrolled this semester.

The track record among private institutions in Vermont, and Champlain College in particular, of relevant programs, career success and critical skill development is attractive for many National Guard students. We would like to be able to help Guard members leverage the power of a Champlain education.



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As a soldier I appreciated what private schools offered to me as a service member. Now that I am working in higher education I understand what all private schools in Vermont realize: that the amount spent on benefits to our military and veteran students is a small price to pay for the tremendous impact that this student population has on our students, faculty and staff.

We ask that you consider supporting Guard members' choice to pursue education at Vermont's private institutions, like Champlain, and not limit educational benefits only to Vermont State Colleges. This approach ensures the best possible educational experience for these students, by allowing them the option to attend an institution that best meets their needs in their chosen field of study, and offers the most potential for upskilling the Vermont workforce in high-demand fields.

Thank you for your consideration.