

16 V.S.A. Sec. 2857. Vermont National Guard Tuition Benefit Program
Legislative Report – 2018-2019 Academic Year
January 15, 2020

To: The Honorable Phil B. Scott, Governor; the House and Senate Committees on Education and the House Committees on Appropriations, and on General, Housing and Military Affairs

From: Marilyn Cargill, Vice President of Financial Aid Services, Marketing and Research, VSAC
Ken Gragg Jr., Deputy Adjutant General, Vermont National Guard

Date: January 15, 2020

Re: Vermont National Guard Tuition Benefits Program Report

Introduction and Background:

Starting on January 1, 2019 the Vermont National Guard Tuition Benefit Program (the “Program”) began to provide full tuition to eligible Vermont National Guard members at the University of Vermont, Community College of Vermont, Northern Vermont University, and up to Northern Vermont University tuition at all other Vermont colleges, as well as funding for approved certificate (nondegree) programs both in and outside Vermont.

For each academic year of attendance under the Program, a Guard member must serve two years in the Guard to receive the full tuition benefit. If the member’s service with the Guard terminates before the member completes the service commitment, other than for good cause as determined by the Guard, the pro rata portion of the tuition paid under the program must be repaid to VSAC pursuant to the terms of an interest-free reimbursement promissory note signed by the member at the time of entering the Program.

On or before November 1 of each year, the President, Chancellor, or equivalent position of each educational institution that participated in the Program during the immediately preceding school year shall report to the Vermont National Guard and VSAC regarding the number of members enrolled at its institution during the school year who received tuition benefits under the program and, to the extent available, the courses or program in which the members were enrolled. On or before January 15 of each year, VSAC and Vermont National Guard shall report these data and other relevant performance factors including information pertaining to the achievement of the goals of this entitlement program and the costs of the program to date, to the Governor, the House and Senate Committees on Education and House Committees on Appropriations, and on General, Housing and Military Affairs.

Timeframe Covered:

In the inaugural year of the Program, Guard members were only eligible for funding for the spring semester as well as any summer classes that started in the May-June semester. For all future years the program will cover a full academic year – July 1 through June 30th.

Spending Outcomes:

The Legislature appropriated \$349,000 for the program. From January 1 through June 30th, the first semester of the program, \$235,697 was disbursed for Guard members attending seven

Vermont schools. Most Guard members received funding for the spring semester only although a few members took advantage of the May-June summer term to be able to maximize eligibility. The average award in most cases was less than 50% of the full tuition due to two factors: 1) The tuition benefit payment for Vermont Technical College, Castleton University, and all Private Colleges is capped at Northern Vermont University's tuition and 2) Guard members are required to use fully-earned Federal Tuition Benefits prior to receiving this Program's funds.

Vermont Technical College had the largest number of Guard members enroll (14); followed closely by Community College of Vermont (13) and Norwich University (12).

Institutional Information on number of members enrolled, funds disbursed, and programs in which members enrolled:

Institution	# Recipients	\$ Disbursed	Average Award	Yearly Tuition	Enrolled Programs
Castleton University	7	\$31,493	\$ 4,499	\$11,184	Business Management, Nursing, Music Education, Health Science, Physical Education, Chemistry
Champlain College	5	\$14,592	\$ 2,918	\$40,910	Business Management, Management Information Systems, Cybersecurity
Community College of VT	13	\$25,157	\$ 1,935	\$8,040	Biology, Applied Health Sciences, Psychology, English, Art, Computer Science, Philosophy, Communications, Math
Norwich University	12	\$69,192	\$ 5,766	\$37,834	Criminal Justice, Construction Management, National Security Policy Studies, Exercise Science and kinesiology, Business Administration and Management
Northern Vermont Univ	2	\$4,296	\$ 2,148	\$10,944	Professional Studies, Criminal Justice
Vermont Technical College	14	\$58,127	\$ 4,152	\$13,896	Renewable Energy, Business Technology, Electrical Engineering Technology, Electromechanical Engineering Technology, Professional Pilot Technology, Diesel Power Technology, Dental

					Hygiene, Construction Management, Licensed Practical Nursing
University of Vermont	5	\$32,840	\$6,568	\$15,504	Business Administration, Civil Engineering, Computer Science, Professional Nursing
Total	58	\$235,697			

Achievement of Goals of the Program (submitted by Ken Gragg Jr., Deputy Adjutant General, Vermont National Guard):

The reporting period covers the inaugural funding cycle for the Vermont National Guard Tuition Benefit Program (VTNGTBP) from 1 January 2019 – 30 June 2019. Based on the funding stipulations for the reporting period which limited the program to members currently enrolled up to a funding cap, there is minimal highlights other than the fact that the recipients immediately benefited from a significant increase in their tuition benefit.

The benefits of the program being fully in-place and being able to offer the education entitlement as a benefit seems to be having a positive impact on the Vermont National Guard and its members going forward. The program seems to be ramping up at a good pace. What we did experience, was a delay of about eight to ten months in the engagement of our soldiers and airmen in the program as the Recruiting & Retention teams along with the Education Officers came up to speed with information and marketing. The direct impact we saw from 1 October 2018 – 30 September 2019 based on data is:

- (1) approximately 60% of new recruits in the Army Guard and 30% of new recruits in the Air Guard are citing the education benefit as their number one incentive for joining the National Guard,
- (2) in previous years the guard has recruited fewer than 30 high school graduating seniors into the guard. Whereas, from 1 October 2018 – 30 September 2019 the guard enlisted 130 graduating high school seniors,
- (3) instead of losing 23 fully trained and qualified national guard members to other states for education benefits, Vermont didn't lose any member to other states for education, and in fact, realized five transfers from other states for our education benefits.

The increase in school enrollment and use of funds will ramp up for the FY2020 reporting period and into the FY2021 reporting period, based on actual basic training completion dates, as well as, if the individual continues immediately onto career field awarding schools or enter into split training option. Budgeting for FY2021 and FY2022 present several new variables that we are attempting to account for; (1) all Air Guard members in the FY2021 budget year will be eligible for the Federal Tuition Assistance program which will provide up to \$4500 per member, and (2) the 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team is slated for a major deployment that will cross half of FY2021 and half of FY2022. Therefore, many members currently enrolled in the tuition benefit program won't be able to attend school. At this point we don't know who will deploy versus who is enrolled in VTNGTBP.