

**16 V.S.A. Sec. 2857. Vermont National Guard Tuition Benefit Program
Legislative Report – 2020-2021 Academic Year**

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, 2022

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. In FY ’21 Vermont Technical College was added to the list of schools where the Program provided full tuition.

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. Funds recouped from loan repayments are added back into the program and given out as new awards.

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. Now, and going forward, the program covers a full academic year – July 1 through June 30th.

Spending Outcomes:

The Legislature appropriated \$1,026,105 for the program. From July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021, \$529,274 was disbursed for Guard members attending twelve Vermont schools.

Norwich University had the largest number of Guard members enroll (26); followed by Vermont Technical College, Community College of Vermont, and the University of Vermont (each with 8 enrolled).

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

Institution	# Recipients	\$ Disbursed	Average Award	Yearly Tuition	Enrolled Programs
Advanced Welding	1	\$11,592	\$11,592	\$22,500	Combination Structural and Pipe Welding Program
Castleton University	2	\$ 7,712	\$ 3,856	\$11,832	Chemistry, Health Science
Champlain College	7	\$ 28,092	\$ 4,013	\$42,564	Integrated Studies, Business Management, Information Security, Accounting, Computer Science and Innovation, Computer and Information Systems
Community College of VT	8	\$ 14,328	\$ 1,791	\$ 8,400	Behavioral Science, STEM Studies, Allied Health, Cybersecurity
Norwich University	26	\$ 271,772	\$ 10,453	\$40,608	Criminal Justice, Construction Management, National Security Studies, Studies in War and Peace, Computer Security, Political Science, International Business, Management, Accounting, Nursing
Northern Vermont Univ	3	\$ 13,621	\$ 4,540	\$11,592	History with licensure, Business Administration, Criminal Justice: Restorative Justice
Pro Driver Training	1	\$5,200	\$5,200	\$5,200	Commercial Driver's License
Stafford Technical Center	1	\$3,760	\$3,760	\$3,760	Welding Certification

Saint Michael's College	2	\$13,592	\$6,796	\$46,175	Biology, Political Science
Vermont Technical College	8	\$ 69,278	\$ 8,660	\$14,712	Professional Pilot, Dental Hygiene, Construction Management, Respiratory Therapy, Nursing
University of Vermont	8	\$ 83,627	\$10,453	\$16,392	Business Administration, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Biological Science, , Psychological Science, Linguistics
Vermont Flight Academy	1	\$6,700	\$6,700	n/a	Multi-Engine Training
Total	68	\$529,274			

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

The reporting period covers the third year in the funding cycle for the Vermont National Guard Tuition Benefit Program (VTNGTBP) from 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021 and the second fully funded period. 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. As anticipated for this reporting period, the program stalled and took a minor step back due primarily to having approximately 1000 soldiers deployed during the second half of the reporting period compared with SFY 2020. As well, all Air Guard members who enroll are now eligible for Federal Tuition Benefits up to \$4500 per year. In SFY 2020 there were 85 participants for \$680K compared to SFY 2021 at 68 participants and \$530K. We anticipate the first half of SFY 2022 will see a similar result as the deployed soldiers return between late January through late April. The data shows (1) new recruits in the Army Guard and Air Guard continue to cite the education benefit as their number one incentive for joining the National Guard with approximately 50% of new recruits in the Army Guard and 40% of new recruits in the Air Guard and (2) continue to see strong results related to enlistments of graduating high school seniors into the guard as a percentage of enlistments.

The school enrollment and use of funds could continue to be flat or see minor increase as soldiers complete their deployments in the first half of SFY2022. Through the Recruiting and Retention process, there has been numerous inquiries regarding second degrees and advance degrees. Prospective recruits in many cases already have a degree and expressed interest in shifting their focus to what the Legislature has recently designated as “critical careers”. The current Vermont National Guard Tuition Benefit Program baseline budget would support an expansion of enrollment options.

