

VETERAN EDUCATION BENEFITS

Virginia Military Survivors & Dependents Education Program, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

Improving reporting data on VMSDEP beneficiaries ► The General Assembly may wish to consider directing the Department of Veterans Services and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to coordinate on reporting (i) the number of beneficiaries determined eligible for the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP), but not yet enrolled at an institution and (ii) the best available estimate of VMSDEP fall semester enrollment at each institution as of November to the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations committees by December 15 each year. (Recommendation 1)

POLICY OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

Policy options for funding VMSDEP without changing program

Appropriating general funds to cover VMSDEP costs ► The General Assembly could appropriate sufficient general funds to cover 100 percent of institutions' forgone revenue for the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) or continue to appropriate general funds at FY25 levels and either (i) distribute funds to institutions in proportion to their percentage of total VMSDEP enrollment or (ii) according to institutions' relative ability to absorb the forgone revenue. (Option 1)

Creating a fund to help finance VMSDEP ► The General Assembly could create a new fund to help finance the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program, using a combination of one-time and ongoing appropriations, and allocate a portion of the fund's balance and investment income each year to institutions. (Option 2)

Policy options for adjusting eligibility or program requirements to improve sustainability

Requiring VMSDEP participants to be in good academic standing ► The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to require that students be in good academic standing at the institution they attend to continue to receive the Virginia Military Survivor and Dependents Education Program tuition and fee waiver. (Option 3)

Considering federal benefits for eligible VMSDEP participants ► The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to require the Department of Veterans Services to ask prospective Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) participants to report on eligibility for federal veterans education benefits and the value of those benefits, and, if Post-911 GI Bill (Chapter 33) benefits are available, require institutions to apply them to the students' tuition and fees prior to applying the VMSDEP tuition and fee waiver. (Option 4)

Limiting VMSDEP waiver to undergraduate education ► The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to limit the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program tuition and fee waiver to undergraduate programs only. (Option 5)

Providing uniform tuition and fee waiver value to VMSDEP beneficiaries ► The General Assembly could require that the value of the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) tuition and fee waiver be the same for all VMSDEP beneficiaries by either (i) establishing a uniform tuition and fee waiver amount that all VMSDEP beneficiaries would receive regardless of the institution attended or (ii) base the value of the tuition and fee waiver each year on the total amount of funds appropriated for the program divided by the number of students likely to enroll, using the best available information at the time. (Option 6)

Changing VMSDEP eligibility or benefit value for veterans rated as 90 percent permanently disabled ► The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to (i) provide a tuition and fee waiver valued at less than 100 percent of an institution's tuition and fees to beneficiaries of the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program who are eligible because the veteran has been rated as 90 percent permanently disabled; (ii) or provide a full tuition and fee waiver to beneficiaries who are eligible because the veteran has been rated as 90 percent permanently disabled and has received the designation of "Individual Unemployability" from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; or (iii) remove 90 percent permanently disabled as an eligibility category. (Option 7)

Changing VMSDEP's residency requirement ► The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to make it more difficult to meet the residency requirement for the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) by (i) eliminating eligibility based on physical presence; or (ii) reducing the likelihood that families will move into Virginia for VMSDEP by increasing the physical presence requirement from five years to 15 years; or (iii) requiring that the veteran entered service in Virginia. (Option 8)

Changing VMSDEP benefit value or eligibility for veterans with military service-related conditions ► The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to (i) provide a tuition and fee waiver valued at less than 100 percent of an institution’s tuition and fees to beneficiaries of the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program who are eligible because the veteran’s qualifying condition arose from military service, rather than being combat related, or (ii) remove conditions arising from military service, rather than being combat related, as an eligibility category. (Option 9)

Policy option to provide participants more flexibility, while reducing program costs

Providing VMSDEP recipients with set, flexible waiver for higher education costs ► The General Assembly could amend the Code of Virginia to allow the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program tuition and fee waiver to be used for any higher education cost considered by the institution to be a cost of higher education, such as room and board, but establish a uniform tuition and fee waiver amount that would apply to all students and institutions to help manage costs and provide more budgetary certainty. (Option 10)