

Date of Hearing: April 14, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Pilar Schiavo, Chair

AB 2203 (Tangipa) – As Introduced February 19, 2026

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary education: priority registration: veterans and dependents of veterans: federal GI Bill.

SUMMARY: Requires, the California State University (CSU) community college district (CCD), and would request the University of California (UC), commencing with the 2028–29 academic year, to grant priority registration for enrollment to students who receives a fee waiver, as specified, and students who are using any federal GI Bill benefits. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires, commencing with the 2028–29 academic year, the CSU and each CCD, and requests the UC to, with respect to each campus in their respective jurisdictions that administers a priority enrollment system, grant priority in that system for registration for enrollment to both of the following:
 - a) A student who is a recipient of the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) fee waiver, as specified; and,
 - b) A student who is using any federal GI Bill benefits.

EXISTING STATE LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Community Colleges (CCC), the CSU, and the UC as the three segments of public institutions of higher education in the state. (Education Code (EDC) § 66010)
- 2) Prohibits UC, CSU, and CCC from charging mandatory systemwide tuition or fees to specified students who apply for a California Department of Veterans Affairs fee waiver, as specified, including:
 - a) A child of any veteran of the United States military who has a service-connected disability, has been killed in service, or has died of a service-connected disability, as specified;
 - b) A dependent, or a surviving spouse who has not remarried, of any member of the California National Guard who, in the line of duty, and while in the active service of the state, was killed, died of a disability resulting from an event that occurred while in the active service of the state, or is permanently disabled as a result of an event that occurred while in the active service of the state; as specified;
 - c) An undergraduate student who is a recipient of a Medal of Honor, commonly known as a Congressional Medal of Honor, or an undergraduate student who is a child of a recipient of a Medal of Honor and who is no more than 27 years old, as specified; and,
 - d) Specifies that shall determine the eligibility of any applicant for a fee waiver (EDC § 66025.3, et seq.)

- 3) Requires the CSU and each community college district, and requests the UC, to grant priority registration for enrollment to a member or former member of the US Armed Forces who is a resident of California and who has received an honorable discharge, a general discharge, or an other than honorable discharge, and to any member or former member of the State Guard, as specified, for any academic term attended at one of these institutions for 4 academic years after leaving state or federal active duty for use within 15 years of leaving state or federal active duty. (EDC § 66025.8)
- 4) Authorizes the CSU and each CCD, and requests the UC to offer priority registration to foster youth, former foster youth, homeless youth, or formerly homeless youth, as defined. (EDC § 66025.9)
- 5) Requires each CCD to offer priority registration to students eligible for disabled student programs and services, students eligible for extended opportunity programs and services, students receiving CalWORKS, and students who receive Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as defined. (EDC §§ 66025.91 and 66025.92)
- 6) Requires each campus of the CSU, and each campus within a CCD, and requests each campus of the UC to offer priority registration to student parents. (EDC § 66025.81)
- 7) Requires CCDs and the CSU and requests the UC to grant priority registration to students employed as first responders. (EDC § 66025.82)
- 8) Prohibits UC, CSU, and CCC from charging mandatory systemwide tuition or fees to the surviving spouse or child of a deceased law enforcement or fire suppression personnel, as specified, and the surviving dependent of any California resident killed in the September 11, 2001 attack, as specified. The fee waivers are limited to undergraduate students who meet the specified financial need requirements. (EDC §§ 68120-68121)
- 9) Provides that statutes related to UC (and most other aspects of the governance and operation of UC) are applicable only to the extent that the Regents of UC make such provisions applicable. (EDC §§ 67400 and 68134)
- 10) Establishes the California Military Department GI Bill Award Program for persons who are active members of the California National Guard, the State Guard, or the Naval Militia to use toward obtaining a certificate, degree, or diploma. In order to qualify for an award, current law requires that the member agree to serve at least two years upon completion of the last academic period that the person uses educational assistance under the program and is required to complete their course of study within 10 years of initial acceptance into the program. Existing law also establishes the eligibility criteria for an award and specifies the qualifying institutions for which the award may be used. (EDC § 69999.16)
- 11) Establishes various educational benefits for dependents of veterans who were killed during military service or are totally disabled, as specified; defines “dependent of a veteran” to include the spouse of a totally disabled veteran; and prohibits a dependent of a veteran from receiving these educational benefits during the time the dependent is entitled to receive specified federal educational benefits or duplicative assistance from any other government source. (Military and Veterans Code § 890, et seq.)

EXISTING FEDERAL LAW:

- 1) Provides that veterans and certain dependents are eligible for education benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017 (Forever GI Bill) eliminated the 15-year time limitation for veterans discharged from active duty on or after January 1, 2013 allowing eligible individuals to use Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits without a time limit. (Public Law 115-48, 38 U.S.Code § 3321, et seq.)
- 2) Provides educational benefits for the spouse and children or both currently serving members of the Armed Forces of the United States and veterans, in such instances where the service member or veteran is permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability, or died while on active duty or as a result of a service-connected disability. (38 U.S. Code § 3500, et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **PURPOSE OF THIS BILL.** According to the author, “California has a long tradition of supporting the men and women who serve our country, as well as their families. Many veterans and their dependents rely on programs such as the CalVet College Fee Waiver and the federal GI Bill to access higher education. However, when students cannot enroll in required courses due to limited class availability, they may face unnecessary delays that prevent them from graduating on time. AB 2203 ensures that students using these earned educational benefits receive priority registration so they can enroll in the courses they need, complete their degrees efficiently, and fully utilize the benefits made available through their service.”
- 2) **BACKGROUND.**
 - a) *College Fee Waiver for Veteran Dependents.* CalVet administers the College Fee Wavier for Veteran Dependents, which waives mandatory system-wide tuition and fees at any CCC, CSU, or UC campus. This program does not cover the expenses of books, parking or room and board. There are four plans under which dependents of Veterans may be eligible, Plans A, B C, and D. Plan A is restricted to:
 - i) The unmarried child of a veteran who is totally service-connected disabled, or whose death was officially rated as service-connected is eligible. The child must be over 14 years old and under 27 years old to be eligible. If the child is a veteran, then the age limit is extended to 30 years old;
 - ii) The spouse of a wartime veteran who is totally service-connected disabled is eligible. There are no age limit restrictions;
 - iii) The unmarried surviving spouse of a wartime veteran whose death has been rated as service-connected is eligible. There are no age limit restrictions; and,
 - iv) Any dependent of any Veteran who has been declared missing in action, captured in the line of duty by hostile forces, or forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty

by a foreign government or power is eligible.

The veteran must have served at least one day of active duty during a period of war as declared by the U.S. Congress, or during any time in which the veteran was awarded a campaign or expeditionary medal. Concurrent receipt of benefits under Plan A and VA Chapter 35 benefits is prohibited.

- b) *Plan B* covers the child of a veteran who has a service-connected disability, or had a service-connected disability at the time of death, or died of service-related causes is eligible. The child's annual income, which includes the child's adjusted gross income, plus the value of support provided by a parent, may not exceed the annual income limit. The current academic year entitlement is based upon the previous calendar year's annual income.

Under Plan B, wartime service is not required and there are no specific age requirements. Children are the only dependents eligible under this plan. There is no prohibition against receiving concurrent VA Chapter 35 benefits.

- c) *Plan C* covers any dependent of any member of the California National Guard, who in the line of duty while on active service to the state, was killed, died of a disability resulting from an event that occurred while in active service to the state, or is permanently disabled as a result of an event that occurred while in the service to the state is eligible. Surviving spouses who have not remarried are also eligible. "Active service to the state," for the purpose of this benefit, means a member of the California National Guard activated pursuant to Section 146 of the MVC.
- d) *Plan D* covers Medal of Honor recipients and children of Medal of Honor recipients under the age of 27 may qualify. Benefits under Plan D are limited to undergraduate studies only, and applicants are subject to both income and age restrictions. There is no prohibition against receiving concurrent VA Chapter 35 benefits.
- e) *Federal GI Bill history*. Education benefits for veterans in the United States began taking shape in the early 20th century. Recognizing that military service often interrupted educational opportunities, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act of 1919, which provided financial assistance to World War I veterans with service-related disabilities. During World War II, additional support emerged through the 1940 Selective Training and Service Act, which ensured job reinstatement and offered training and rehabilitation services for disabled veterans.

A major turning point came in 1944 with two key laws. The Veterans Act granted veterans preference in federal hiring, but the Servicemen's Readjustment Act—better known as the GI Bill—had the most lasting impact. It provided unemployment benefits, educational assistance, and low-interest loans for homes, farms, and businesses. This legislation became the foundation for all future veterans' benefits programs, with later acts expanding access to education and training, including provisions for spouses and dependents of disabled or deceased veterans.

In the decades that followed, veterans' education programs continued to evolve. Laws in 1966 and 1976 expanded benefits and introduced new structures, including requiring

service members to contribute financially. In 1984, the Montgomery GI Bill was established, requiring active-duty personnel to contribute part of their pay during their first year of service. Made permanent in 1987, this program aimed to support veterans' transition to civilian life while also encouraging military recruitment and retention, offering additional incentives such as supplemental benefits for specialized skills.

- f) *Post 9/11 GI Bill and Forever GI Bill.* The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides education benefits to individuals who have served at least 90 days of active duty on or after September 10, 2001, with coverage for training pursued since August 1, 2009. These benefits are not limited to veterans alone—they are also available to active service members and, in many cases, can be extended to their families, making them a significant resource for long-term educational and career advancement. Eligibility for full or partial benefits depends on length of service, with those serving less than 36 months receiving a percentage of the total benefit.

The Forever GI Bill, as noted in Existing Law, builds on this foundation by enhancing existing education programs rather than creating a new one. It was designed to address gaps in the original Post-9/11 GI Bill and improve access and flexibility for service members, veterans, and their families. Specifically, the Forever GI Bill eliminated the 15-year time limitation for veterans discharged from active duty on or after January 1, 2013 allowing eligible individuals to use Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits without a time limit.

- g) *Priority registration.* Priority registration decisions are made at the campus level at each segment. The process allows specific students access to classes ahead of the general student population. For example, continuing students generally are allowed to enroll in courses before new students enroll. As such, students who have priority registration status have an advantage over other students.

In addition to priority registration granted by the campuses, existing law requires the CSU and/or CCCs, and requests the UC to grant priority enrollment to the following students:

- i) CSU California Promise students (CSU);
- ii) Current and former foster youth (CSU, CCCs and UC);
- iii) Homeless youth (CSU, CCCs and UC);
- iv) A member or former member of the US Armed Forces who is a resident of California and who has received an honorable discharge, a general discharge, or an other than honorable discharge, and to any member or former member of the State Guard, as specified, for any academic term attended at one of these institutions for four academic years after leaving state or federal active duty for use within 15 years of leaving state or federal active duty;
- v) Any student who is a CalWORKs or Tribal TANF recipient (CCCs); and,
- vi) Students in the Community College Extended Opportunity Programs and Services program, and disabled students who are determined to be eligible for disabled student programs and services (CCCs).

- 3) **SUPPORT.** The Clovis Veterans Memorial District writes in strong support that the California Veterans Fee Waiver supports dependents of disabled veterans, those killed in service, or those who died from duty related causes. These students often face unique

challenges, including financial constraints and family obligations linked to their loved ones' sacrifices. Despite the importance of this benefit, many eligible students encounter obstacles that delay their education, such as limited course availability and registration. Priority registration offers a straightforward solution, allowing Fee Waiver recipients to enroll in necessary courses efficiently. WestCare California, also in support, states that this bill aligns educational access with the spirit of the Fee Waiver. By enabling priority registration, this bill helps prevent bottlenecks and supports timely graduation, honoring the sacrifices of California's veteran families.

- 4) **DOUBLE REFERRAL.** This bill is double referred, it passed the Assembly Committee on Higher Education on consent by a vote of 10-0 on April 7, 2026.
- 5) **RELATED LEGISLATION.** SB 892 (Grove) removes, commencing July 1, 2027, limitations on the duration and timing for which the CSU and CCDs are required, and the UC is requested, to grant priority registration for enrollment to a current and former member of the US Armed Forces.
- 6) **PREVIOUS LEGISLATION.**
 - a) AB 3017 (Medina) of 2020 would have required, commencing with the 2028–29 academic year, the CSU and each CCD, and requests the UC to, with respect to each campus in their respective jurisdictions that administers a priority enrollment system, grant priority in that system for registration for enrollment to any member or former member of the US Armed Forces, and who is a resident of California, who has received an honorable discharge, a general discharge, or an other than honorable discharge, and to any member or former member of the State Military Reserve, Guard, for any academic term attended at one of these institutions during any period for which the student is eligible for education benefits under the GI Bill–Active Duty program, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program, or the Post-9/11 GI Bill program. AB 317 was referred to the Assembly Higher Education Committee, but was never set for hearing.
 - b) AB 2133 (Cook) Chapter 400, Statutes of 2012, allows a former member of the Armed Forces of the United States to use his or her four years of priority registration enrollment at the CSU and CCC within 15 years of leaving active duty.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Clovis Veterans Memorial District
 Fresno Federal American Legion Auxiliary Unit 509
 WestCare California, INC.

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Patty Patten / M. & V.A. / (916) 319-3550