
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 2203 **Hearing Date:** June 10, 2026
Author: Tangipa
Version: February 19, 2026
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Olgalilia Ramirez

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

NOTE: This bill has been referred to the Committees on Education and *Military and Veterans Affairs*. A “do pass” motion should include referral to the Committee on *Military and Veterans Affairs*.

SUMMARY

This bill requires, commencing with the 2028-29 academic year, each campus of the California State University (CSU) and California Community Colleges (CCCs), and requests each campus of the University of California (UC) that administers a priority enrollment system, to grant priority to recipients of federal GI Bill benefits and recipients of the specified state fee waiver for military-connected students.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) 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 it shall determine the eligibility of any applicant for a fee waiver. (Education Code (EC) § 66025.3, et seq.)
- 2) Requires the CSU and requests the UC to grant priority registration for enrollment to students employed as first responders, as defined. (EC § 66025.82)
- 3) 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. (EC § 69999.16)
- 4) 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 (MVC) § 890, et seq.)
- 5) Provides, under federal law, 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 United States Code (U.S. Code) § 3321, et seq.)
- 6) Provides, under federal law, 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.)
- 7) Requires the CSU and each community college district (CCD), and requests the UC, to grant priority registration for enrollment to a member or former member of the Armed Forces of the United States 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. (EC § 66025.8)

- 8) 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. (EC § 66025.9)
- 9) 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. (EC § 66025.91 and 66025.92)
- 10) Requires, beginning no later than July 1, 2023, 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. (EC § 66025.81 (a)(1))

ANALYSIS

- 1) This bill requires, commencing with the 2028-29 academic year, each campus of the CSU and CCCs, and requests each campus of the UC that administers a priority enrollment system to grant priority for registration for enrollment to both of the following:
 - a) A student who is a recipient of the CalVet College Fee Waiver Program, including specified dependents of disabled or deceased veterans, eligible family members of California National Guard members killed or disabled in the line of duty, and Medal of Honor recipients and their children.
 - b) A student who is using any federal GI benefits.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) **Need for the bill.** According to the bill 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) **Who is eligible?** Under existing law, students who are dependents of disabled or deceased veterans, dependents or surviving spouses of certain California National Guard members killed or disabled in the line of duty, and Medal of Honor recipients and their children qualify for a waiver of the mandatory tuition fee known as the CalVet College Fee waiver. Additionally, federal law provides education benefits through the Post-9/11 GI Bill to eligible veterans, active duty service members, and, in some cases, family members. The Forever GI Bill expanded these benefits by eliminating the 15 year time limit for using Post-9/11 GI Bill educational assistance for veterans discharged on or after January 1,

2013. This bill makes recipients of the CalVet College Fee Waiver program and recipients of any GI benefit program eligible for priority enrollment at CSU and CCCs, and requests UC to do the same.

- 3) **Priority registration for enrollment.** Priority enrollment 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 are generally 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:

- a) CSU California Promise students (CSU).
- b) Current and former foster youth (CCCs, CSU, and UC).
- c) Homeless youth (CCCs, CSU and UC).
- d) Any member or former member of the Armed Forces of the United States, 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, for any academic term attended at one of these institutions for four academic years after he or she has left state or federal active duty, which he or she shall use within 15 years of leaving state or federal active duty (CCCs, CSU, and UC).
- e) Any student who is a CalWORKs or Tribal TANF recipient (CCCs).
- f) 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).
- g) Students employed as first responders (CSU and UC).

This bill adds to this list of groups for which priority registration must be granted. The Committee may wish to consider at what point priority becomes overprescribed.

The author argues that recipients of federal GI benefits have 36 months worth of financial support. Due to these short times lines, students can easily be derailed if they are unable to secure the necessary courses to complete their degree on time.

- 4) **Fiscal impact.** According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee analysis, this bill would have the following fiscal impact:

- One-time Proposition 98 General Fund costs of approximately \$140,000 for the CCCs, collectively statewide, to implement a new category of priority registration. According to the CCC Chancellor's Office, there are approximately 5,000 veteran students who would meet eligibility criteria for priority enrollment under this bill.
- Minor and absorbable costs to the campuses of the UC and the campuses of the CSU. Both segments report a significant reduction in potential cost exposure to their systems due to the delayed implementation of the bill's requirements for the 2028-29 academic year.
- The UC Office of the President notes the bill would add about 6,500 eligible students to the existing priority registration student population at the UC, currently comprised of students with special needs, student parents, and foster youth.

5) **Related legislation.**

SB 892 (Grove, 2026), commencing July 1, 2027, removes 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 student who is a current or former member of the Armed Forces of the United States. SB 892 was heard by this Committee on March 18, 2026, and was unanimously approved. SB 892 has been referred to the Assembly Committees on Higher Education and Military and Veterans Affairs.

SUPPORT

California State University, Office of the Chancellor
County of Kern
County of Placer
Fresno County Veterans Service Officer
WestCare California, Inc.

OPPOSITION

None received

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