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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

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### AB 264 (Carrillo) - Veterans: benefits

**Version:** January 16, 2025

**Urgency:** No

**Hearing Date:** August 18, 2025

**Policy Vote:** M.&V.A. 5 - 0

**Mandate:** No

**Consultant:** Lenin Del Castillo

**Bill Summary:** This bill allows a qualified child or spouse of a veteran who is permanently and totally disabled, or who died in the line of duty, to concurrently receive educational benefits under the California College Tuition Fee Waiver and the federal Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) programs

### Fiscal Impact:

- The University of California (UC) estimates General Fund costs of \$1.2 million each year to provide additional fee waivers under the California College Tuition Fee Waiver program.
- The Chancellor's Office indicates that the Proposition 98 General Fund costs resulting from this bill is unknown as it is difficult to predict how many more CalVet fee waivers would be issued. However, the fee waiver would only affect a small population of students and these students may already be receiving a California Promise Grant that is available to students with financial need, regardless of military status.
- The California State University (CSU) indicates that the cost to provide additional fee waivers as a result of this bill is difficult to determine since the number of students that will utilize the benefit is unknown.
- The California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) anticipates no additional costs as a result of this measure.

**Background:** The CalVet administers the College Fee Wavier for Veteran Dependents, which waives mandatory system-wide tuition and fees at any UC, CSU, or community college campus. This program does not cover the expense of books, parking, or room and board expenses. There are four plans under which dependents of veterans may be eligible: Plans A, B C, and D. Plan A is restricted to a child, spouse, or unmarried surviving spouse of a veteran who is totally service-connected disabled or whose death was officially rated as service-connected are eligible. If the child is a veteran, then the age limit is extended to age 30. There are no age limit restrictions for the spouse or unmarried surviving spouse of a wartime veteran. Additionally, 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.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs administers the DEA program, which offers education and training to qualified dependents or survivors of veterans who are

permanently and totally disabled because of a service-related condition, or who died while on active duty or as a result of a service-related condition. DEA recipients receive a monthly payment (approximately \$1,500 per month for 36 months for a full-time student) to help cover the cost of college or graduate degree programs, career training certificate courses, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training.

**Proposed Law:** By deleting the prohibition in existing law, this bill would allow a qualified child or spouse of veteran who is permanently and totally disabled, or who died in the line of duty, to concurrently receive educational benefits under the California College Tuition Fee Waiver and the federal Survivors' and DEA programs.

**Related Legislation:** AB 2736 (Carrillo, 2024) was similar to this bill and vetoed by the Governor with the following message:

"This bill expands access to the California College Fee Waiver program by eliminating a prohibition that prevents a dependent of a veteran from receiving state benefits while the dependent is entitled to receive specified federal education benefits, or duplicate assistance from any other government source.

While I support the author's goal of expanding access to higher education for dependents of veterans, this bill would result in General Fund ongoing costs in the millions of dollars annually and should be considered as part of the annual budget process.

In partnership with the Legislature this year, my Administration has enacted a balanced budget that avoids deep program cuts to vital services and protected investments in education, health care, climate, public safety, housing, and social service programs that millions of Californians rely on. It is important to remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure."

**Staff Comments:** Concurrent receipt of benefits under the College Fee Waiver for Veteran Dependents (Plan A) and DEA programs is prohibited. According to the author, "...the spouses and children of disabled veterans are eligible for both the California College Tuition Fee Waiver and Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA). Veterans have earned these benefits through the severity of their injuries during their time of service, including the hundreds of thousands who live within my district. In 1972, a bill was passed that prohibited the acceptance of both benefits at the same time. The reasoning was that the DEA program fully covered tuition during this time, and receiving both programs was considered duplicate assistance. However, there is an exacerbated need to accept both programs simultaneously due to increasing living expenses, rising tuition rates, and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic."

This bill would eliminate the prohibition against the concurrent receipt and usage of benefits under these programs.

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