
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1188 (Archuleta) - Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps: home instruction, independent study, and private schools

Version: April 9, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: April 27, 2026

Policy Vote: ED. 7 - 0, M.&V.A. 4 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill Summary: This bill codifies a federal requirement for local educational agencies (LEAs) operating Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) programs to allow participation by homeschooled students residing in their attendance area. The bill also requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to post information about JROTC programs and provide implementation guidance to LEAs.

Fiscal Impact:

- The bill's requirements could result in one-time General Fund costs in the tens of thousands to low hundreds of thousands of dollars. Specifically, the CDE would be responsible for making information about JROTC programs on its website, including eligibility and application requirements, and distributing implementation guidance to LEAs on an annual basis. Presumably, the CDE would also need to identify which students qualify as "homeschooled" for purposes of participating in the program.
- The bill's proposal allowing homeschooled students to participate in JROTC programs is not expected to result in an expansion in students eligible to participate since the provision merely codifies an existing federal requirement. Additionally, the number of JROTC units is typically subject to the availability of federal funds.

Background: Existing federal law establishes the JROTC program within the U.S. Department of Defense, with the purpose of promoting citizenship, leadership, and service among secondary school students. The program is implemented through cooperative agreements with LEAs. Federal law establishes the purpose, structure, and minimum requirements for the program, including curriculum, instructor qualifications, and unit viability standards.

Existing law authorizes JROTC units to be established at public and private secondary schools that meet specified federal requirements, including minimum enrollment, facilities, and course of instruction. It requires participating schools to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the applicable military department and comply with federal standards related to instructor qualifications, program oversight, and student eligibility.

Existing law provides federal support for JROTC programs, including assignment or certification of instructors, provision of curriculum materials and equipment, and partial reimbursement of instructor salaries, with remaining costs typically borne by the LEA.

Proposed Law: This bill provides that LEAs that operate JROTC programs shall permit membership for homeschooled pupils residing within the LEA's attendance area who meet all applicable eligibility requirements for participation, consistent with federal law.

This bill requires CDE to post information about existing JROTC programs, including eligibility and application requirements, on its internet website and distribute implementation guidance to LEAs on an annual basis.

The bill defines LEA as a school district, charter school, or county office of education.

Staff Comments: The JROTC is one of the largest youth development programs in the country, serving hundreds of thousands of students each year and offering multi-year coursework in leadership, civics, and life skills, along with extracurricular components such as drill teams and community service. The programs operate within fixed structural constraints tied to federal requirements, staffing models, and funding levels. Each unit typically requires a minimum of two instructors, often retired military personnel certified by the applicable service, and must maintain minimum student participation levels to remain viable. However, the number of JROTC units is constrained by federal appropriations which has resulted in a waiting list of schools seeking to establish new units.

This bill would require LEAs that offer a JROTC program to permit participation by homeschooled students who reside within the LEA's attendance area and meet all other eligibility requirements. According to the author, "Many military families opt to homeschool their children; nearly twice the rate of civilian families. They face unique challenges associated with military life which create instability and at times affect families' abilities to adapt to new surroundings and routines. State policies that streamline access to educational resources such as extracurricular activities and sports better support students and their families. Prioritizing clarifying participation requirements for Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, JROTC, can contribute to greater stability for military families, which supports retention efforts. Allowing homeschooled students to participate in JROTC programs maintains military cultural connections and leadership development opportunities. California can facilitate access by clarifying state policy that pursuant to federal law, homeschool children are required access to JROTC programs. SB 1188 ensures local education agencies provide clear and accessible guidance to schools and information for parents. This bill supports military family values while providing structured programs that complement homeschool education."

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