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THIRD READING

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Bill No: SB 1188  
Author: Archuleta (D)  
Amended: 4/9/26  
Vote: 21

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SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/8/26  
AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Reyes

SENATE MILITARY & VETERANS COMMITTEE: 4-0, 4/20/26  
AYES: Archuleta, Grove, McNerney, Umberg  
NO VOTE RECORDED: Menjivar

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 5/14/26  
AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

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**SUBJECT:** Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps: home instruction,  
independent study, and private schools

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Defense

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**DIGEST:** This bill updates California's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) law by requiring a local educational agency (LEA) that offers a JROTC program to allow participation by eligible homeschooled pupils who reside within the LEA's attendance area and directs the California Department of Education (CDE) to post information on existing JROTC programs and related eligibility requirements online and provide annual implementation guidance.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing federal law:

- 1) Establishes the JROTC program within the U.S. Department of Defense, with the purpose of promoting citizenship, leadership, and service among secondary school students.

- 2) 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.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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.
- 5) Requires each public secondary school operating a JROTC unit to permit participation by homeschooled students residing in the area served by the school who are otherwise qualified for participation but for lack of enrollment at the school.

Existing state law:

- 1) Authorizes the governing board of a school district maintaining a secondary school to establish courses in military science and tactics that comply with federal law governing Reserve Officers' Training Corps units.
- 2) Prohibits requiring a student to enroll in a course in military science and tactics.

This bill:

- 1) Revises state law to authorize an LEA, defined to include a school district, county office of education, or charter school, to establish JROTC courses at its school sites in compliance with federal law.
- 2) Prohibits a pupil enrolled in a school that offers JROTC courses from being required to enroll in military science and tactics.
- 3) Requires an LEA that offers a JROTC program to permit participation by homeschooled pupils who reside within the agency's attendance area and meets all otherwise applicable eligibility requirements.
- 4) Requires the California Department of Education to post information on existing JROTC programs, including eligibility and application requirements

for homeschooled pupils, on its internet website and to distribute annual implementation guidance to local educational agencies.

### Comments

- 1) *Need for the bill.* 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 effect 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 in 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.”
- 2) *JROTC is a federally structured program operating through local educational agencies.* The JROTC is a federally authorized program administered by the U.S. Department of Defense and 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.

While the program is delivered at the schoolsite level, it is not solely a local program. Instead, it reflects a shared federal-local model in which the federal government provides curriculum, equipment, and partial funding for instructors, while LEAs employ instructors, provide facilities, and integrate the program into the school day.

The JROTC is one of the largest youth development programs in the country, serving hundreds of thousands of students annually and offering multi-year coursework in leadership, civics, and life skills, along with extracurricular components such as drill teams and community service. These features distinguish JROTC from traditional academic courses and place it closer to a structured program with defined staffing and operational requirements.

- 3) *Program structure and funding create inherent capacity constraints.* Unlike traditional academic courses, JROTC 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.

At the national level, the number of JROTC units is constrained by federal appropriations, and military services generally operate at or near capacity, maintaining waiting lists of schools seeking to establish new units. As a result, program expansion is limited, and participation within existing units is bounded by available instructor staffing, facilities, and program design.

These features suggest that JROTC programs function more like capacity-limited instructional programs or specialized pathways than open-enrollment offerings. This distinction is relevant when considering how access requirements operate in practice.

- 4) *Federal law establishes a narrow access requirement limited to homeschooled students.* Federal law requires that public secondary schools operating JROTC units permit participation by homeschooled students residing in the area served by the school, provided those students meet all other eligibility requirements, but for lack of enrollment at the school.

This requirement is narrowly framed and reflects a specific policy choice to ensure access for students who are not enrolled in the host school due to the nature of their educational setting.

- 5) *Homeschooled students can encompass multiple pathways.* While federal law refers to “homeschooled students,” California does not use a single, uniform definition of that term. Instead, pupils educated at home may do so through several distinct legal pathways.

These include enrollment in a public school independent study program (either through a school district or charter school), enrollment in a private school that offers home-based or remote instruction, or instruction through a home-based private school established by a parent through a private school affidavit. In some cases, students may also receive instruction from a credentialed tutor. These pathways differ in meaningful ways, particularly with respect to whether a pupil is formally enrolled in a public school, a private school, or not enrolled

in a traditional school setting. As a result, the term “homeschooled” can encompass a range of students with different legal statuses under state law.

Understanding these distinctions may be important for purposes of implementing the federal requirement that homeschooled students be permitted to participate in JROTC programs. This bill assigns CDE responsibility for making information about JROTC programs, including eligibility and application requirements, available on its website and for distributing implementation guidance to LEAs on an annual basis. In doing so, this bill appears to contemplate that CDE will provide guidance regarding which pupils qualify as “homeschooled” for purposes of JROTC participation.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 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.

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 5/14/26)

U.S. Department of Defense (source)  
California Family Council  
Military Services in California

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 5/14/26)

None received

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