

Tennessee Bill for Veterans Proposes In-State Tuition, Other Help

By [Jane Roberts](#)

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Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris has drafted a bill that would make Tennessee public colleges and universities more veteran-friendly, starting with in-state tuition for vets moving to Tennessee.

“We have what I call a benefits gap when it comes to men and women returning from service,” said Norris, R-Collierville. “The G.I. Bill benefits package only pays cost of in state tuition. Under Tennessee law, if you relocate to Tennessee, you have to wait a year before you qualify.

“This is intended to plug that gap if you relocate to Tennessee within 24 months of being discharged.”

Veterans would then have a year to establish residency and show proof with a driver’s license, motor vehicle registration, pay stub or by registering to vote.

House Speaker Pro Tem Curtis Johnson, R-Clarksville, is co-sponsor. The House and Senate bills would establish the Veterans Education Transition Support (VETS) Act, funneling resources to help vets meet their educational goals here.

The Act would also create a VETS Campus designation for colleges taking concrete steps to better serve veterans. Schools could earn the designation by offering orientation programs specifically for vets, outreach programs or by working with staff to improve awareness of issues specific to veterans.

“The designation tells prospective students who are veterans that the school has a network of resources available that they can relate to and need,” Norris said. “At these campuses, veterans would know there are others like them. With what they have gone through, it sometimes helps to know there are others with similar experiences.”

Norris worked with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to craft the bill.

“I commend the Senate Majority Leader on this piece of legislation,” said Cato Johnson, THEC board president. “It is extremely important and extremely timely, and I know he has spent a great deal of time working with Rich Rodda (THEC executive

director) and the staff as it relates to this legislation.”

Norris is chairman of the newly formed veterans subcommittee, part of the House and Senate state and local government committee. He is also on the state workforce development board of directors.

“One of the issues I have been working on is postsecondary education as it relates to workforce training and development,” Norris said. “These issues are related.”

By helping veterans connect quickly with colleges and other postsecondary options, the state can benefit from veterans’ life experiences, including training they learned in the military, he said.

Johnson, who has worked with Norris on other pieces of veteran-related legislation, represents constituents around Fort Campbell, the Army base which strides the Tennessee-Kentucky border. It is the home of the 101st Airborne Division and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment.

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