



MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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Proposal: Streamlining State Soldiers Assistance Program (SSAP) Education Benefits

Bill: HF 4344 (Rep. Coulter)/SF____(Sen.)

Background: Last year, MDVA and the Wilder Foundation conducted a comprehensive survey with a diverse group of Veterans stakeholders to look at modernizing SSAP benefits. This led to the following recommendations to update Minn. Stat. §197.75:

Sunset the Veteran Education Benefit currently provided within Minn. Stat. §197.75

This underutilized benefit is a one-time \$750 grant for Veterans who have exhausted their GI Bill benefits without obtaining a bachelor's degree. The sunset will have minimal impact as its been offset by increased benefits for the Minnesota GI Bill approved during the 2023 Legislative Session.

Expand the Surviving Spouse and Dependent Education Benefit to spouses and children of Veterans with a service-connected disability of seventy percent (70%) or greater as rated by the United States Veterans Administration

Survey data underscores the pressing need to address tuition costs within SSAP's education support, a high percentage of respondents highlighted this issue. Subsequent analysis supports expanding eligibility to include spouses and children of Veterans with a service-connected disability.

Incorporate the provisions of Minn. Stat. §197.752 (Educational Assistance to POW/MIA Dependents) within Minn. Stat. §197.75 and repeal Minn. Stat. §197.752 as a stand-alone statute.

The review also revealed an education benefit closely resembling the SSAP Surviving Children and Spouses benefit but fell outside the study's scope. Therefore, it is logical to consider consolidating the provisions of Educational Assistance to POW/MIA Dependents within SSAP Education Benefits.

Increase the annual educational assistance stipend from \$750 to \$1,500 to account for inflation.

This adjustment aligns with the recommendation to broaden eligibility for the Surviving Spouse and Dependent Education Benefit, addressing the study's identification of higher education costs as a significant education barrier.

These proposed changes enhance the efficiency, accessibility, and equity of MDVA's education benefits and modernizing the education programs offered through Minn. Stat. §197.75 would enable MDVA to assist dependents of Veterans more comprehensively in existing service areas while increasing administrative efficiencies.

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