

**Subject** Veteran Education Benefits

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## Overview

This bill would modify higher education assistance programs administered by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA).

Among other things, H.F. 4344 would eliminate provisions authorizing \$750 education stipends for certain veterans who have exhausted their federal education benefits, and expand eligibility to include the spouses and children of certain living or deceased veterans with a service-connected disability. It would also allow MDVA to use Minnesota GI Bill funding to provide education stipends of \$1,500 per year to eligible spouses and children.

## Summary

Section	Description
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1	<b>Definitions.</b>
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Modifies program eligibility by defining, redefining, or eliminating key terms.

Expands eligibility to include (1) surviving spouses and children of veterans with a service-connected disability of at least 70 percent at the time of death, (2) spouses and children of living veterans when the veteran has a service-connected disability of at least 70 percent, (3) spouses and certain children of POW/MIA veterans, (4) spouses and children of deceased veterans who were not a state resident within six months of entering the armed forces or for the six months preceding death, and (5) spouses and children who attend a Tribal college.

Requires eligible spouses and children to apply for assistance before the end of the academic year and to satisfy the definition of “resident student,” which is used under current law to determine eligibility for most state financial aid programs administered by the Office of Higher Education and requires, among other things, that the student has lived in Minnesota for at least one year. Eliminates the definition of “eligible veteran.”

Section	Description
	Provides that once a person qualifies as an eligible spouse or child, there is no circumstance that would justify MDVA denying them education assistance.
2	<b>Benefits; eligibility.</b> Increases the annual educational assistance stipend for eligible spouses and children from \$750 to \$1,500 per year. Eliminates the \$750 single payment for eligible veterans. Requires MDVA to award financial stipends on a funds-available basis.  Requires Minnesota’s public postsecondary institutions to waive fees (and tuition) for eligible spouses and children pursuing a bachelor’s degree.
3	<b>Proof of eligibility.</b> Modifies the eligibility documentation that spouses and children must provide. Coinciding with the elimination of the \$750 onetime stipend for veterans, this section also eliminates a corresponding requirement to submit a statement confirming that the veteran has exhausted their entitlement to federal education benefits. Requires proof of service-connected disability where applicable.
4	<b>Participation by eligible institutions.</b> Technical – conforming change.
5	<b>Appropriation.</b> Authorizes MDVA to use an existing statutory appropriation for the Minnesota GI Bill to fund education stipends for eligible spouses and children.
6	<b>Repealer.</b> Repeals a statute that requires (1) Minnesota public postsecondary institutions to allow dependents of POW/MIA veterans to attend free of charge to obtain a bachelor’s degree or certificate of completion, and (2) a state-paid education stipend of up to \$250/year for these same dependents.



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