



## **H.B. 95 – Supporting Our Military-Connected Higher Education Students**

*Representatives Andrea White and Brian Stewart  
April 30, 2025*

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing us to share sponsor testimony on HB 95, a bill that will help Ohio attract, recruit, retain and engage more veterans in our schools, our businesses and our communities. HB 95 aims to help our military-connected students start and stay in school to achieve new degrees, credentials and career paths by strengthening the work of the offices of Veteran and Family Support in 51 of Ohio’s colleges and universities.

Ohio has long been strong in support for our military members, our veterans and their families.

- We were the first state in the nation with both College and K-12 “Purple Star” designation for military family inclusive schools.
- We launched the Military Strategic Implementation Team (MSIT) at the Department of Higher Education to promote policy and programs for military members and their families.
- The Ohio Veterans Education Council (OVEC) was established as a coalition, with members from all public and several private institutions.
- And in the 131<sup>st</sup> General Assembly, the Legislature passed House Bill 64 to create Veteran and Military Service Member Support at Ohio colleges and universities to come alongside students and help

them achieve successful outcomes in higher education opportunities.

I might add - HB 64 came with expectations but no appropriation. It's been almost 10 years. Progress has been made in some of our colleges and universities to better support our military members and veterans in their educational attainment and reintegration success. But it's time we put more resources into helping all of our public and participating private higher ed institutions across the state recruit, retain and better serve those who have served as they seek to call Ohio home and succeed in civilian life.

Ohio is already serving more than 20,000 veteran students using VA benefits. We can lead the nation in recruiting and supporting military members as they prepare for the next chapter of their lives.

What Representative Stewart and I are proposing through HB 95 is to equip all 51 participating member institutions of the Ohio Veterans Education Council to do the following: 1) expand student support by enlisting military-connected student leaders to serve as a "force multiplier" on campus; 2) identify and implement best practices in veteran student support and services; 3) build the on-campus support needed to create and sustain a more military-inclusive environment; and 4) achieve impact and gain efficiencies in an all-of-Ohio approach.

Specific ways HB 95 will help our higher education institutions achieve these goals with an investment of approximately \$2.3 million over the biennium include:

- Scholarships for Military Community Advocate students chosen on each campus to receive a service scholarship (\$1k per semester, plus \$500 for programming) and placed in departments on campus to develop more military-inclusive programming and policies, increase community, solve problems, and help staff and faculty learn about issues facing this cohort of students.
- Grants to help our 51 Military and Veteran Offices support growth in private philanthropy to develop long-term sustainability funding

- Support for fundraising and development training, and better engagement with employers to hire veteran graduates at all 51 higher ed institutions through participation in an Advancement Institute led by the Ohio-based National Veterans Leadership Foundation that brings together Military & Veterans Offices, development officers, marketing, and career resource leaders to align on initiatives and strategies for military-connected students.
- Creation of a Website and Communications for the Ohio Veterans Education Council, to help administer membership and Ohio Purple Star status, promote public knowledge and social media outreach, and facilitate better sharing of information.

Ohio is already serving more than 20,000 veteran students using VA benefits. The transition from service to civilian life is an extremely difficult process, and we have the opportunity through HB 95 to help make it easier for veterans to lay down roots in this great State and achieve post-service success. We can lead the nation in recruiting and supporting military members as they prepare for the next chapter of their lives.

This bill was included in the House version of the operating budget we passed April 9 and it is our goal to keep it there by swiftly moving HB 95 through the House. We are grateful for this opportunity to share more specifics and we also are hopeful for the opportunity for proponents, including veteran students and veteran leaders, to come in and share why it is urgent that we come alongside the many returning veterans who have sacrificed so much and are seeking to land and grow into a strong future in civilian life.

You will hear from one of those veterans today – my joint sponsor, Representative Stewart. As you may know, Rep. Stewart served our country valiantly and as a veteran returned home and pursued his educational dreams by earning both undergraduate and law degrees from The Ohio State University. His journey from combat veteran to

public servant is a testament to the power of education and service-driven leadership. Rep. Stewart will now share some of his personal journey and why he such a staunch supporter of this legislation as joint sponsor. And following his remarks, we are happy to answer any questions you may have.