

1 AN ACT concerning education.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**  
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Higher  
5 Education Veterans Service Act.

6 Section 5. Definitions. For purposes of this Act:

7 "Task Force" means the Task Force on Service Member and  
8 Veterans Education.

9 "Public colleges and universities" means public community  
10 colleges subject to the Public Community College Act, the  
11 University of Illinois, Southern Illinois University, Chicago  
12 State University, Eastern Illinois University, Governors State  
13 University, Illinois State University, Northeastern Illinois  
14 University, Northern Illinois University, and Western Illinois  
15 University.

16 Section 10. Findings.

17 (a) Pursuant to Public Act 95-736, the General Assembly  
18 created the Task Force on Service Member and Veterans Education  
19 to examine the manner in which public colleges and universities  
20 in the State of Illinois provided education to servicemen and  
21 servicewomen as well as veterans of the armed forces of the  
22 United States.

1           The Task Force conducted hearings and filed its findings  
2 with the General Assembly on September 16, 2008. Its report  
3 urges the General Assembly to recognize the sacrifice of  
4 American servicemen and women, and, in a small way, repay them  
5 by chartering a concerted effort by State government, in  
6 cooperation with our public institutions of higher learning, to  
7 make its best efforts to take positive, quantifiable steps to  
8 providing a superior learning environment for student veterans  
9 and service members. The Task Force reviewed the unique needs  
10 of veterans and military personnel, combined with the large  
11 number of active duty personnel and military veterans seeking  
12 higher education since the onset of the Global War on  
13 Terrorism. The Task Force found that public universities and  
14 community colleges in this State have varying levels of  
15 assistance available for active duty service personnel and  
16 veterans.

17           (b) The Task Force has reported that veterans and active  
18 duty personnel have difficulty in finding and receiving various  
19 State and federal education-related benefits and services that  
20 they may be eligible to receive, such as educational loans,  
21 scholarships, grants, local employment opportunities, access  
22 to medical care, a social network for support of student  
23 veterans, and groups to help with the transition to becoming a  
24 civilian after service in an active duty unit, because such  
25 programs are administered by different arms of the government.

26           (c) The Task Force found that the various public colleges

1 and universities in this State have a wide array of programs  
2 and services available to veterans and active duty service  
3 personnel, ranging from online educational opportunities,  
4 admission and academic counseling, medical services, and  
5 family housing information.

6 (d) The Task Force also found that certain other higher  
7 education institutions across the United States have adopted  
8 programs and services that seek to better promote and  
9 coordinate the assistance that is available for veterans and  
10 active duty personnel.

11 Section 15. Survey; coordinator; best practices report;  
12 best efforts.

13 (a) All public colleges and universities shall, within 60  
14 days after the effective date of this Act, conduct a survey of  
15 the services and programs that are provided for veterans,  
16 active duty military personnel, and their families, at each of  
17 their respective campuses. This survey shall enumerate and  
18 fully describe the service or program that is available, the  
19 number of veterans or active duty personnel using the service  
20 or program, an estimated range for potential use within a  
21 5-year and 10-year period, information on the location of the  
22 service or program, and how its administrators may be  
23 contacted. The survey shall indicate the manner or manners in  
24 which a student veteran may avail himself or herself of the  
25 program's services. This survey must be made available to all

1 veterans matriculating at the college or university in the form  
2 of an orientation-related guidebook.

3 Each public college and university shall make the survey  
4 available on the homepage of all campus Internet links as soon  
5 as practical after the completion of the survey. As soon as  
6 possible after the completion of the survey, each public  
7 college and university shall provide a copy of its survey to  
8 the following:

9 (1) the Board of Higher Education;

10 (2) the Department of Veterans' Affairs;

11 (3) the President and Minority Leader of the Senate and  
12 the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House of  
13 Representatives; and

14 (4) the Governor.

15 (b) Each public college and university shall, at its  
16 discretion, (i) appoint, within 6 months after the effective  
17 date of this Act, an existing employee or (ii) hire a new  
18 employee to serve as a Coordinator of Veterans and Military  
19 Personnel Student Services on each campus of the college or  
20 university that has an onsite, daily, full-time student  
21 headcount above 1,000 students.

22 The Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student  
23 Services shall be an ombudsperson serving the specific needs of  
24 student veterans and military personnel and their families and  
25 shall serve as an advocate before the administration of the  
26 college or university for the needs of student veterans. The

1 college or university shall enable the Coordinator of Veterans  
2 and Military Personnel Student Services to communicate  
3 directly with the senior executive administration of the  
4 college or university periodically. The college or university  
5 shall retain unfettered discretion to determine the  
6 organizational management structure of its institution.

7 In addition to any responsibilities the college or  
8 university may assign, the Coordinator of Veterans and Military  
9 Personnel Student Services shall make its best efforts to  
10 create a centralized source for student veterans and military  
11 personnel to learn how to receive all benefit programs and  
12 services for which they are eligible.

13 Each college and university campus that is required to have  
14 a Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student  
15 Services shall regularly and conspicuously advertise the  
16 office location, phone number, and Internet access to the  
17 Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student  
18 Services, along with a brief summary of the manner in which he  
19 or she can assist student veterans. The advertisement shall  
20 include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

21 (1) advertisements on each campus' Internet home page;

22 and

23 (2) any promotional mailings for student application.

24 The Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student  
25 Services shall facilitate other campus offices with the  
26 promotion of programs and services that are available.

1           (c) Upon receipt of all of the surveys under subsection (a)  
2 of this Section, the Board of Higher Education and the  
3 Department of Veterans' Affairs shall conduct a joint review of  
4 the surveys and post, on any Internet home page they may  
5 operate, a link to each survey as posted on the Internet  
6 website for the college or university. Upon receipt of all of  
7 the surveys, the Office of the Governor, through its military  
8 affairs advisors, shall similarly conduct a review of the  
9 surveys and post the surveys on its Internet website. Following  
10 its review of the surveys, the Office of the Governor shall  
11 submit an evaluation report to each college and university  
12 offering suggestions and insight on the conduct of student  
13 veteran-related policies and programs.

14           (d) The Board of Higher Education and the Department of  
15 Veterans' Affairs may issue a best practices report to  
16 highlight those programs and services that are most beneficial  
17 to veterans and active duty military personnel. The report  
18 shall contain a fiscal needs assessment in conjunction with any  
19 program recommendations.

20           (e) Each college and university campus that is required to  
21 have a Coordinator of Veterans and Military Personnel Student  
22 Services under subsection (b) of this Section shall make its  
23 best efforts to create academic and social programs and  
24 services for veterans and active duty military personnel that  
25 will provide reasonable opportunities for academic performance  
26 and success.

1           Each public college and university shall make its best  
2 efforts to determine how its online educational curricula can  
3 be expanded or altered to serve the needs of student veterans  
4 and currently-deployed military, including a determination of  
5 whether and to what extent the public colleges and universities  
6 can share existing technologies to improve the online curricula  
7 of peer institutions, provided such efforts are both  
8 practically and economically feasible.

9           Section 20. Fiscal impact and reporting. Beginning on  
10 September 1 of the year following the effective date of this  
11 Act and each subsequent September 1, each college and  
12 university that is required to have a Coordinator of Veterans  
13 and Military Personnel Student Services under subsection (b) of  
14 Section 20 of this Act shall report to the Board of Higher  
15 Education on the fiscal impact of the programs and services  
16 related to the requirements of this Act.

17           The Board of Higher Education shall compile the information  
18 and, within 60 days after receipt of such information, issue a  
19 report reflecting the information for each institution  
20 required to report under this Section. The report must be filed  
21 with the Governor, the Governor's Office of Management and  
22 Budget, the Director of Veterans' Affairs, the Speaker of the  
23 House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, the  
24 Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, and the  
25 Minority Leader of the Senate.

1           Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon  
2 becoming law.