

February 23, 2011
Testimony in support of H.F. 384
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Chair Lanning, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written support for H.F. 384. I am the Vice President of the Minnesota State College Student Association. Our association represents the students in Minnesota's public two-year community and technical colleges.

First, I'd like to thank Representative Dettmer for his work on this bill. When our students heard that the Higher Education Veterans Assistance program would expire at the end of Fiscal Year 2012, they were very concerned. Even though only a fraction of our students are veterans, we all share a deep appreciation for the sacrifices our veterans have made. It was once said that our Veterans jump in line to serve our country, and should not have to wait in line to further their education. It is with that spirit that our students have directed us to support the extension of this very important program.

The Higher Education Veterans Assistance Program serves a lot of students for a very low price. For the cost of about one million dollars a year, the program provides 13 regional campus representatives that service 62 public colleges and universities throughout Minnesota. The campus representatives help staff on-campus veteran centers and train student veteran workers. They provide much needed assistance to veterans to help them process their financial aid, GI bill, and VA benefits. Moreover, they help returning veterans with their reintegration into civilian life and provide a community space where veteran students can share their experiences with their fellow brothers and sisters in arms. They are also able to refer veterans who are experiencing mental health or other problems to the appropriate social services agencies.

In the last year alone, the Higher Education Veterans Program serviced over 17,500 veteran students. Together, these student veterans utilized the program over 70,000 times in 2010.

Our veterans did not give up on this country, and we cannot give up on them. Every veteran should have the chance to transition to a successful civilian life, and this program makes that possible.

Nobody knows the struggles of a veteran like a veteran, and that's why this program works so well. The campus representatives are employees of the Department of Veterans affairs and not employees of the colleges where they work. They know how to navigate the complex system of veteran benefits and can offer our students help with issues other college employees cannot.