

Notes for House Education Committee 5/9/2012

- Thank you to Chair and Committee members
- Introduce myself
- Thank you to Representative Hughes for her commitment to veterans – a commitment that the 28 community colleges in Michigan share
- Unfortunately, I must come before you today in opposition to HJR MM due to a number of important concerns we have with the resolution
- The Board of Directors of the Michigan Community College Association has consistently advocated that the Michigan Constitution requires that community colleges be governed by locally-elected boards, and that decisions about critical issues such as tuition are central to a locally-elected board exercising its management responsibilities for each college
- Moreover, the MCCA fears that HJR MM will provide very little benefit to veterans, and may in fact result in reduced services in their educational experience
- Our initial estimate based on self-reported attendance by veterans at member colleges is that HJR MM would collectively cost Michigan's community colleges about \$4 million
- Unfortunately, that reduced revenue, by and large, would not go to making college more affordable for veterans
- Federal veterans benefits already cover the full cost of college for many veterans. The Post-9/11 GI Bill pays tuition and fees up to the most expensive public in-state undergraduate program rate, provides a monthly housing allowance, and a stipend for books and supplies

- **In addition, the Yellow Ribbon Program exists for out-of-state fees and costs above the cap**
- **Other programs cover different service members based on their status and dates of service, and veterans can also qualify for more traditional sources of student aid such as Pell Grants**
- **The Michigan Community College Association believes that if the federal government is willing to recognize the service of our veterans and compensate them with educational benefits, the state should not choose to turn down federal funds and ask our colleges to shoulder that cost**
- **\$4 million across 28 community colleges may not sound like a lot to people who usually count in billions**
- **However, that funding currently goes a long way to providing important wraparound services to veterans**
- **I shared with each of you a document announcing the opening of a new veterans' resource center at Oakland Community College just last month**
- **In addition, you each have an article about the stop the mobile vet center will be making tomorrow at Kalamazoo Valley Community College**
- **KVCC, the State of Michigan's Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and the Workforce Development Agency have all teamed up to offer veterans a "one-stop shop" to ensure that the veterans are receiving all benefits for which they qualify**
- **The State has already worked with North Central Michigan College to hold a Mobile Vet Center event back in March, and was at Kellogg Community College just yesterday. Two more collaborative events will take place next week at Muskegon Community College and Grand Rapids Community College**

- **These sorts of services are not isolated events – in fact, according to GI Jobs magazine, 17 of Michigan’s community colleges are rated “military friendly schools”**
- **Unfortunately, if Michigan chooses to adopt HJR MM and turn down federal educational benefits for veterans, the MCCA fears that these very real support systems for our veterans will be among the programs that colleges must sacrifice to absorb \$4 million in lost revenue**
- **Can we do better? Always. Michigan ranks near the very bottom of the list of all states in terms of accessing available veterans benefits – including medical benefits, survivors benefits, and the whole package of which educational benefits are just a small piece**
- **The MCCA has already begun engaging with Deputy Director Jason Allen and his staff at the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, with Michigan’s counties, and with our public universities**
- **These entities have teamed up to create the Consortium of Michigan Veterans Educators, which is actively engaged in a dialogue about developing ways to better support student veterans, military service members, and their families**
- **The MCCA would like to thank Representative Hughes and the House Education Committee for being part of that dialogue, and for seeking ways to remove barriers both to college access for student veterans, and to college completion**
- **Although I must respectfully ask you not to move forward with HJR MM today, I look forward to continuing this partnership to create greater pathways to success for those who have served our country**