

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Community Affairs Committee

BILL: SB 2034

INTRODUCER: Senator Baker

SUBJECT: Educational Opportunities/Children and Spouses of Deceased and Disabled Veterans

DATE: March 15, 2006

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Vickers	Yeatman	CA	Favorable
2.	_____	_____	EA	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

This bill extends certain state-sponsored educational benefits currently available to the children of deceased and disabled veterans to the spouses of such veterans. The bill establishes eligibility criteria and use restrictions governing this program.

This bill substantially amends sections 295.01, 295.03, and 295.05 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Section 295.01, F.S., establishes eligibility requirements for post-secondary scholarships for dependents of certain military veterans. Currently, this section provides financial assistance for the dependent children of veterans who:

- died as a result of service-connected injuries, disease, or disability sustained while on active duty; or
- have been determined to have a service-connected total and permanent disability rating of 100 percent.

In order to qualify for this scholarship the parents of such children must have been bona fide residents of the state for 1 year immediately preceding the death or occurrence of disability.

Subsections 295.02-295.05, F.S., establish certain requirements relating to program eligibility and funding for dependent children of deceased or disabled veterans. For example, s. 295.02, F.S., provides that state financial assistance must be used to pay tuition and registration fees, board, and room rent and to buy books and supplies for qualifying dependents who are between

the ages of 16 and 22 years and who are in attendance at a state-supported institution of higher learning, including a community college or career center. Similarly, s. 295.05, F.S., provides that eligibility for admission is not affected by the provisions of ch. 295, F.S., but all dependents receiving benefits under this chapter must be enrolled according to the customary rules and requirements of the institution attended.

State Board of Education Rule 6A-20.019, F.A.C., establishes additional eligibility requirements for this program. Eligible students are required to:

- Submit a completed Florida Financial Aid Application for Students by April 1.
- Be a dependent child between the ages of 16 years and 22 years of a Florida qualified veteran by the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs. All military actions and wars from World War I through the Persian Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom may qualify program applicants.
- Meet Florida’s general post-secondary eligibility requirements.
- Be enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program.
- Not owe a repayment or be in default on any state or federal Title IV grant, scholarship, or loan program unless satisfactory arrangements to repay have been made.
- Not have previously received a bachelor’s degree.

TABLE 1: Scholarships for Children of Deceased or Disabled Veterans

Year	Students Awarded	Average Award	Expended Funds	Appropriations
2000-01	158	\$1,590	\$251,191	\$333,250
2001-02	168	\$1,768	\$297,062	\$333,250
2002-03	151	\$1,961	\$296,130	\$333,250
2003-04	157	\$2,053	\$322,294	\$333,250
2004-05	149	\$2,105	\$313,691	\$333,250

Florida Department of Education, *Annual Report to the Commissioner*, 2005.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill amends s. 295.01, F.S., to provide that it is declared policy of the state to provide educational opportunities at state expense for spouses of deceased or disabled servicemembers.

The *unremarried spouse of a deceased servicemember* qualifies for these educational benefits: (1) if the servicemember and his or her spouse had been residents of the state for 1 year immediately preceding the servicemember’s death; and (2) if the unremarried spouse applies to use the benefits within 5 years after the servicemember’s death.

The *dependent spouse of a disabled service member* qualifies for these education benefits: (1) if the servicemember and his or her spouse have been married to each other for 1 year; (2) if the servicemember and his or her spouse have been residents of the state for 1 year immediately preceding the occurrence of the servicemembers disability; and (3) only during the duration of the marriage and up to the point of termination of the marriage by dissolution or annulment.

Notwithstanding s. 295.02, F.S., funds appropriated to carry out these provisions may only be used for tuition and registration fees at state-supported institutions, including community colleges and career centers.

The bill also amends ss. 295.03 and 295.05, F.S., to conform these sections to changes implemented in s. 295.01, F.S.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The bill would enable an unknown number of spouses of deceased and disabled servicemembers to receive post-secondary scholarships.

C. Government Sector Impact:

As depicted in Table 1, 149 eligible students were funded at an average award of \$2,105 for the 2004-05 academic year with an expenditure of \$313,691. The appropriation was \$333,250 leaving a balance of \$19,559, which could fund an additional 9 students without additional appropriations. The number of additional students who would be eligible for this scholarship program due to expansion to spouses of deceased or disabled veterans is indeterminate at this time. Should more than 9 students apply or tuition increases require a higher expenditure, a pro-ration of the award could be required.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

None.

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