



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy Unveils New Bill to Help Veterans Secure SUNY Credit for Military Training

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY November 19, 2013

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At Veterans Forum and Services Fair, Kennedy outlined the VETS Credits Act, which will make college more affordable for veterans and help them complete coursework faster.

Kennedy: By giving credit where credit is due, New York State and its public university system can ease and accelerate veterans' transition into civilian life.

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, today unveiled new legislation that will help veterans get academic credit from the State University of New York (SUNY) for their

military training. Kennedy announced the bill at his Veterans Forum and Services Fair – which he held Tuesday to help connect local veterans to the services and support they earned while serving our great nation.

Kennedy's bill – titled the Veterans' Education Through SUNY Credits Act or VETS Credits Act – requires SUNY to establish a statewide policy that will ensure military veterans receive college credit for relevant coursework from their military training.

"Student veterans often have other obligations while attending school, including full-time jobs and supporting their family. For many, the goal is to complete their degree as quickly as possible in order to expedite the transition from soldier to civilian," said Senator Tim Kennedy. "By giving credit where credit is due, New York State and its public university system can accelerate veterans' transition into and increase their marketability in our competitive labor force. Once our VETS Credits Act is approved and signed into law, the state will continue its longstanding tradition of honoring our veterans and promoting the State of New York as a welcoming place for our heroes to call home."

Currently, several local colleges and some SUNY institutions offer college credit for certain training, but there is no universal statewide policy for SUNY schools. Kennedy's bill would change that.

Under the VETS Credits Act, the SUNY Board of Trustees will develop a policy requiring all schools within the SUNY and City University of New York (CUNY) systems – including colleges and community colleges – to award academic credit to student veterans for courses that were part of their military training or service. To receive academic credit, the military coursework must meet the standards of the American Council on Education or equivalent standards.

The American Council on Education, in collaboration with the Department of Defense, evaluates military transcripts from each branch of service and makes recommendations for appropriate academic credit. Veterans, throughout their military careers, receive valuable and translatable education that should be acknowledged at institutions of higher learning. Kennedy's VETS Credits Act will ensure SUNY accepts military training and grants appropriate credit.

Western New York is home to multiple colleges that are regularly recognized as being military friendly. In fact, the Military Times recently ranked D'Youville College number one on their list of best colleges for vets. Kennedy says the VETS Credits Act will ensure SUNY's veterans policies are brought up to meet the standards that have been set here at colleges in Western New York.

Meanwhile, New York State has fallen behind dozens of other states that have already passed legislation to require their university systems to accept military training for academic credit. At least 25 states – Alabama, Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming – have already approved new laws directing their state university systems or boards of education to develop policies to grant credit for military service, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"The VETS Credits Act will make college more affordable and accessible for veterans," Kennedy said. "It will make New York State a leader in supporting veterans and position SUNY as the premier public university system for veterans pursuing higher education."

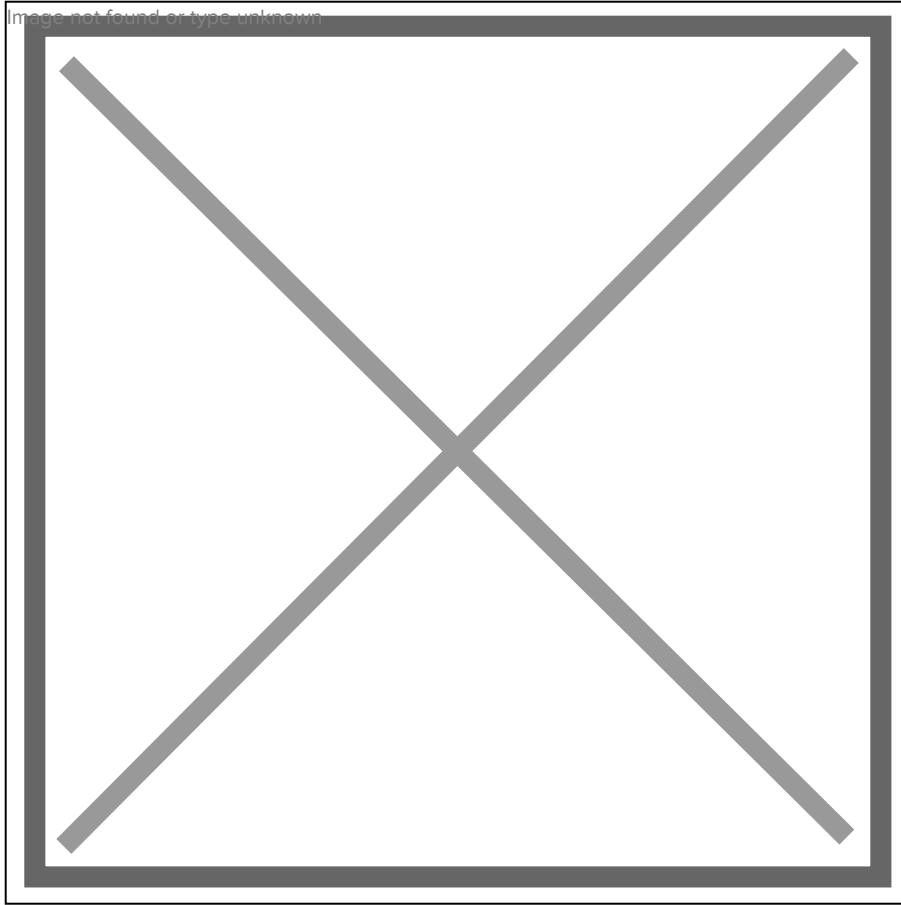
Senator Kennedy speaks to constituents at his Veterans Forum.

While outlining his legislative priorities to support veterans Tuesday, Kennedy also announced a new bill he's proposing that will waive drivers' license renewal fees for New York State's

veterans and seniors. Kennedy says this bill will provide well-deserved relief to New Yorkers who need – and deserve – it most and serve as an acknowledgment of our appreciation for veterans' invaluable sacrifices and service.

At Senator Kennedy's Veterans Forum and Services Fair, more than 200 local veterans gathered to meet with various service providers and connect with available resources on site. Over 20 agencies and organizations participated in the event, including Western New York Veterans Housing Coalition, Veterans One-Stop Center of WNY, Erie County Veterans Services, SPCA Paws & Patriots, Headway of NY, NYS Division of Veterans Affairs, CASH Coalition, Statler Center-Olmsted Center for Sight, Erie County Mental Health Association, local colleges' veterans affairs offices and others.

"Western New York's veterans worked hard and fought bravely to keep our nation and our state strong," said Senator Kennedy. "We must always ensure they are able to fully access the support and services they earned and deserve. They've served us; now it's our turn to serve them."



Senator Kennedy with (from left) Tom Bennett of WNY Veterans Housing Coalition, Dan Frontera from ECC's Office of Veterans Affairs, and Roger Woodworth of the Veterans One-Stop Center of WNY.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.