



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John E. Brooks

## New Gold Star Family Free Tuition Bill Introduced In NY State Senate After Assembly Rejection Backlash

JENNI FINK April 16, 2019

| ISSUE: [GOLD STAR FAMILIES, VETERANS, HOMELAND SECURITY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS, MILITARY APPRECIATION, MILITARY SERVICE](#)

| COMMITTEE: [VETERANS, HOMELAND SECURITY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS](#)



“We’re going to provide the families where someone is lost as a result of military participation [with] tuition assistance,” Brooks said. “Those dependents are going to have the future they should have. We can’t make up for the loss of the parent but we can at least make sure they get the college education they deserve.”

*Originally published in [Newsweek](#) on April 16, 2019*

On Monday, New York state Senator John Brooks introduced a bill similar to the one held in the Assembly that would provide free college tuition to Gold Star families. But the new bill added a stipulation that it wouldn't take effect until 2020, which the sponsor considered a key detail to ensuring its passage.

Assemblyman Stephen Hawley's bill allowing dependents of military members killed while serving in their official capacities to attend either the State University of New York or the City University of New York free of charge was held by the Higher Education committee on April 9.

Given that the holding of the bill came after New York approved a budget with \$27 million allocated to support the Jose Peralta New York State Dream Act, which offers financial aid to undocumented immigrants, Hawley told Newsweek it sent a message about the state's priorities. Brooks, however, told Newsweek that it wasn't a matter of the state's priorities, it was a matter of the budget already having been set.

"The major problem with it, in the end, was the fact that it had current budget year spending without that spending being in the budget," Brooks explained. "If you're putting a bill forward that has spending in it, you've got to have the funding in the budget, and the funding for this wasn't in the budget."

For his bill, Brooks made it effective on April 1, 2020, which gave legislators time to identify the funding and incorporate it into the budget for fiscal year 2021, and for the universities to prepare for the estimated 500 additional students who would be eligible with the expansion. A Military Enhanced Recognition Incentive and Tribute (MERIT) scholarship already in place provides financial aid to dependents of service members killed in combat.

Brooks added that America owes a “great debt of gratitude” to anyone who served in the military, regardless of whether it was in a combat zone or not. Since many service members are the primary breadwinners in their households, the state senator said a loss of life clouds the financial future of their children. As a state that understands how important education is and that it’s the key to success, he said the state Legislature would make sure families of lost service members could send their children to college.

“We’re going to provide the families where someone is lost as a result of military participation [with] tuition assistance,” Brooks said. “Those dependents are going to have the future they should have. We can’t make up for the loss of the parent but we can at least make sure they get the college education they deserve.”

The support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and a broad range of bipartisan legislators, combined with the provision that it would be enacted in 2020 made Brooks confident that his bill would pass and be signed into law. He regretted that providing free tuition to Gold Star families, which was about doing what was right, “turned into politics” and that a technical problem of not having the funding was blown up into something else.

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2019-S5187**

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- Introduced
  - ◦ In Committee Assembly

- In Committee Senate
  
- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
  
- ◦ Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
  
- Delivered to Governor
  
- Signed By Governor
  
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Provides free tuition expenses for dependent family members of N.Y. state military personnel

April 12, 2019

In Senate Committee **Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs**

Sponsored by **John E. Brooks**

Do you support this bill?