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TO: The Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
FROM: Becky Smith, Director of Government and Community Relations
RE: Neither For Nor Against LD 827
An Act To Help Veterans Access Jobs, Education, and Housing
DATE: April 5, 2021

The Maine Community College System is proud to serve our veterans and their families by supporting their access to and success in post-secondary educational opportunities and assisting them in accessing benefits. As you may know, MCCS has the lowest tuition in New England and offers hundreds of academic programs across the state and on-line that prepare our students to be successful in today's ever-changing economy.

All seven of the Maine Community College System colleges have a VA Certifying Official (VACO) who also serves as an advisor. The colleges provide a range of support services to our Veteran students from certifying them for benefits, to helping them to navigate through college, to helping them form a sense of belonging and community.

The MCCS already provides much of what is outlined in this bill. Our colleges have long supported veterans. In fact, Southern Maine Community College, the first of the colleges in the System, was founded to serve World War II veterans who needed to learn new skills as they returned to civilian life and a transformed economy. We are very proud of the fact that two of our colleges, SMCC and CMCC received the 2021-2022 Military Friendly School designation from VIQTORY.

We provide services to all veterans regardless of discharge status. Outreach to veterans begins on websites and in admission, onboarding, advising, and support service offices. Veterans and their dependents have a range of educational benefits that cover the cost of attendance from tuition and fees, to books and other learning resources, to living expenses. These are clearly iterated on the college's websites, in printed materials, and by the Veteran advisors. Veterans can also receive Title IV benefits, including Pell grants and loans, if they are eligible, so that Veterans who pursue a post-secondary education after VA benefits have expired are still able to access Federal, state, and institutional support.

Colleges also provide targeted services and activities to honor and support Veterans—focused orientation and First Year Experience classes; Veterans club/associations; lounge/center; luncheons and social activities throughout the academic year; and many also extend special privileges to Veterans in honor of their service, from special parking spaces to graduation distinctions. The colleges VACO/Advisors also work together across colleges and regionally to coordinate and improve services to Veterans.

Below you will find a list of just a few specific examples of our work with the veteran community:

- KVCC hosts the monthly meeting for the Somerset County Maine Military Community Network (MMCN) which is open to all students.
- KVCC and EMCC are a part of a VA Certifying Official group that has traditionally met quarterly in Bangor. Because there is a significant number of veterans who rotate between area colleges, the colleges in that region have developed this closer partnership and communication process between the institutions—University of Maine, Husson, Beal, EMCC, KVCC, College of the Atlantic, NTI, Maine Maritime Academy, and University of Maine Augusta—to provide improved support to Veterans and their dependents. Due to the success of this collaborative effort, the colleges in the southern part of the state are planning a similar collaboration with UNE and USM.
- SMCC sends a student and staff to the Student Veterans of America Conference (SVA) in order to stay current on best practices in regard to support and benefits.
- SMCC hires student veterans to run the on-campus VA center—providing resources to one another. SMCC is also members of both The National Association of Veterans Program Administrators and the Association of Veterans Education Certifying Officials.
- YCCC is working to connect with Veterans on a social media app called Nearpeer that connects people with similar interests and hopes to provide more on campus supports when our campuses more fully reopen this fall.
- NMCC not only waives the application fee for Veterans but has been designated a “Veteran-Friendly” campus and works closely with incoming veterans in reviewing military training records and any prior college coursework to determine where credit can be given through a prior learning assessment process. Also, a current student has been called to active duty out of state. He will soon be deployed overseas. NMCC has worked with him to allow him to continue his coursework remotely.
- WCCC, in addition to taking many of the steps listed above, also has a Veterans’ monument and walkway on campus, adjacent to their garden. Community members can buy bricks in honor of Veterans to be placed along the path.

We applaud Senator Rafferty’s desire to assist those who serve our country, as well as their dependents, to obtain an education and welcome any opportunity to work with the legislature and our sister institutions to assure they have the benefits they are entitled to and deserve.