

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES

2007 ANNUAL REPORT

TO

GOVERNOR TIMOTHY M. KAINE

AND

THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ON THE

**VIRGINIA MILITARY SURVIVORS
AND DEPENDENTS EDUCATION PROGRAM**

November 29, 2007



Virginia Department of Veterans' Services

Serving those who served.

**Department of Veterans Services
2007 Annual Report on the
Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program**

Background

Under the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP), tuition and required fees are waived at Virginia public colleges and universities for the qualified survivors and dependents of certain military service members. Through the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependent Education Fund (VMSDEF), financial assistance is provided to offset the costs of room, board, books, and supplies.

“Qualified survivors and dependents” is defined as the spouse or a child between the ages of 16 and 29 of a military service member who, while serving as an active duty member in the United States Armed Forces, United States Armed Forces Reserves, the Virginia National Guard, or Virginia National Guard Reserve, during military operations against terrorism, on a peacekeeping mission, as a result of a terrorist act, or in any armed conflict subsequent to December 6, 1941, was killed or is missing in action or is a prisoner of war, or of a veteran who, due to such service, has been rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as totally and permanently disabled or at least 90 percent disabled, and has been discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. Domiciliary requirements also apply, and are detailed in the Code of Virginia.

As required by the Code, the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services must report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly on the agency’s policies and strategies relating to dissemination of information about the Program. The report must also include the number of current beneficiaries, the educational institutions attended by beneficiaries, and the completion rate of the beneficiaries. This annual report provides the first update on the achievements of the VMSDEP.

Information Dissemination

A full time communications officer was hired in June, 2006, and improvements in public relations, outreach notification, press releases, public testimony, and internal communication have resulted from this action. During the last year, multiple news releases were issued, hundreds of bookmarks and an FAQ sheet were distributed, and information was posted on the DVS website.

During 2008 DVS will kick off an enhanced VMSDEP awareness campaign. Preliminary plans focus on several targets to increase awareness of and enrollment in the VMSDEP.

- Reach out to counselors and students at the high school level
Career and education counselors in public and private high schools will be provided information about the VMSDEP, so that they may communicate this information to

students who may be eligible for the VMSDEP. This will result in earlier education about potential eligibility for VMSDEP benefits. This knowledge could increase the number of students enrolled in the Program.

- Contact dependents with remaining eligibility
VMSDEP provides up to four years of education benefits. Prior to FY07, eligible dependents were required to use their benefits prior to age 25. For FY07, the upper age limit was raised to 29. DVS will attempt to contact eligible dependents who may have remaining eligibility.
- Target the spouses and dependents of Afghan and Iraq war veterans
Virginia's new generation of veterans are experiencing severe wounds and injuries resulting in disability ratings that meet or exceed the 90 percent requirement for VMSDEP eligibility. News releases and public service announcements will continue to target the spouses and children of these new heroes. Program materials will also be distributed at Virginia's three VA medical centers in Salem, Hampton, and Richmond.
- Review new USDVA ratings decisions
DVS claims examiners review all new rating decisions promulgated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) Roanoke Regional Office. DVS will use the rating decisions to identify and contact potential new VMSDEP beneficiaries.
- Update USDVA phone counselor with the change in legislation
The DVS staff provides orientation and updates to new employees and to the senior management staff of the USDVA Roanoke Regional Office. An updated information sheet and a copy of our frequently asked questions will be presented to them so that they can train call center counselors and field representatives about the program changes.
- Partner with other state agencies to notify eligible spouses of VMSDEP benefits
Unlike dependent children, eligible spouses are not limited by age in qualifying for VMSDEP benefits. Spouses wishing to pursue certificates, diplomas, or degrees at a post secondary public institution of higher learning will be encouraged to apply.

Current Beneficiaries and Institutions Attended

As of October 31, 2007, 523 VMSDEP students were enrolled at a public college or university. Of these 523 students, 398 attended full-time, while 125 attended part-time. The majority (301, or 57.5 percent) attended a community college or two-year institution, while 222 (42.4 percent) attended a four-year institution. Ninety-three students – or almost 18 percent, attended Tidewater Community College. Virginia Commonwealth University was second with 44 students, and Thomas Nelson Community College and Old Dominion University tied for third at 34 students each. More detailed information is presented in Appendix A.

Completion Rates

The Department of Veterans Services is working with the State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) to accurately define and quantify the completion rate of beneficiaries. In previous years, DVS focused solely on tracking benefits eligibility, regardless of whether the student had completed his/her degree program prior to exhausting his/her VMSDEP eligibility. After agreeing on a standard definition of completion rate, DVS and SCHEV will put in place the procedures to accurately track completion rates.

APPENDIX A

Educational Institutions Attended by VMSDEP Beneficiaries – as of October 31, 2007

Virginia Four-Year Public Institutions			
Institution Name	Full Time	Part Time	Total
Christopher Newport University	5	0	5
College of William and Mary	6	0	6
George Mason University	10	6	16
James Madison University	9	2	11
Longwood University	8	0	8
Norfolk State University	12	2	14
Old Dominion University	30	4	34
Radford University	26	1	27
University of Mary Washington	4	2	6
University of Virginia	9	0	9
University of Virginia's College at Wise	9	0	9
Virginia Commonwealth University	43	1	44
Virginia Military Institute	2	0	2
Virginia State University	5	1	6
Virginia Tech	22	3	25
Sub-Total: 4-year institutions	200	22	222

Virginia Two-Year Public Institutions			
Institution Name	Full Time	Part Time	Total
Richard Bland College	2	0	2
Sub-Total: 2-year institutions	2	0	2

Virginia Community Colleges			
Institution Name	Full Time	Part Time	Total
Blue Ridge Community College	6	6	12
Central Virginia Community College	4	9	13
Dabney S. Lancaster Community College	2	0	2
Danville Community College	1	1	2
Eastern Shore Community College	0	0	0
Germanna Community College	5	3	8
J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College	4	3	7
John Tyler Community College	8	4	12
Lord Fairfax Community College	3	6	9
Mountain Empire Community College	14	3	17
New River Community College	9	1	10
Northern Virginia Community College	7	1	8
Patrick Henry Community College	4	2	6
Paul D. Camp Community College	4	1	5
Piedmont Virginia Community College	2	2	4
Rappahannock Community College	3	2	5

Southside Virginia Community College	7	2	9
Southwest Virginia Community College	12	1	13
Thomas Nelson Community College	17	17	34
Tidewater Community College	62	31	93
Virginia Highlands Community College	11	4	15
Virginia Western Community College	6	3	9
Wytheville Community College	5	1	6
Sub-Total: Community Colleges	196	103	299

Grand Total – as of 10/31/07		
Full Time	Part Time	Total
398	125	523

APPENDIX B

Code of Virginia, § [23-7.4:1A](#)

§ [23-7.4:1](#). Waiver of tuition and certain charges and fees for eligible children and spouses of certain military service members, eligible children and spouses of certain public safety personnel, and certain foreign students.

A. There is hereby established the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program. Qualified survivors and dependents of military service members, who have been admitted to any public institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution granting a degree, diploma, or certificate in the Commonwealth of Virginia, upon certification to the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services of eligibility under this subsection, shall be admitted free of tuition and all required fees.

The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program shall be implemented pursuant to the following:

1. For the purposes of this subsection, "qualified survivors and dependents" means the spouse or a child between the ages of 16 and 29 of a military service member who, while serving as an active duty member in the United States Armed Forces, United States Armed Forces Reserves, the Virginia National Guard, or Virginia National Guard Reserve, during military operations against terrorism, on a peacekeeping mission, as a result of a terrorist act, or in any armed conflict subsequent to December 6, 1941, was killed or is missing in action or is a prisoner of war, or of a veteran who, due to such service, has been rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as totally and permanently disabled or at least 90percent disabled, and has been discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. However, the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services may certify dependents above the age of 29 in those cases in which extenuating circumstances prevented the dependent child from using his benefits before the age of 30.

2. Such qualified survivors and dependents shall be eligible for the benefits conferred by this subsection if the military service member who was killed, is missing in action, is a prisoner of war, or is disabled (i) was a bona fide domiciliary of Virginia at the time of entering such active military service or called to active duty as a member of the Armed Forces Reserves or Virginia National Guard Reserve; (ii) is and has been a bona fide domiciliary of Virginia for at least five years immediately prior to the date on which the admission application was submitted by or on behalf of such qualified survivor or dependent for admission to such institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution; (iii) if deceased, was a bona fide domiciliary of Virginia on the date of his death and had been a bona fide domiciliary of Virginia for at least five years immediately prior to his death; (iv) in the case of a qualified child, is deceased and the surviving parent had been, at some time previous to marrying the deceased parent, a bona fide domiciliary of Virginia for at least five years or is and has been a bona fide domiciliary of Virginia for at least five years immediately prior to the date on which the admission application was submitted by or on behalf of such child; or (v) in the case of a qualified spouse, is deceased and the surviving spouse had been, at some time previous to

marrying the deceased spouse, a bona fide domiciliary of Virginia for at least five years or is and has been a bona fide domiciliary of Virginia for at least five years prior to the date on which the admission application was submitted by such qualified spouse.

3. From such funds as may be appropriated and from such gifts, bequests and any gifts, grants, or donations from public or private sources, there is hereby established the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Fund for the sole purpose of providing financial assistance for board and room charges, books and supplies, and other expenses at any public institution of higher education or other public accredited postsecondary institution granting a degree, diploma, or certificate in the Commonwealth of Virginia for the use and benefit of qualified survivors and dependents.

Each year, from the funds available in the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Fund, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and its member institutions shall determine the amount and the manner in which financial assistance shall be made available to beneficiaries and shall make that information available to the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services for distribution.

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia shall be responsible for disbursing to the institutions the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by the Commonwealth of Virginia to support the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Fund and shall report to the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services the beneficiaries' completion rate.

The maximum amount to be expended for each such survivor or dependent pursuant to this subsection shall not exceed, when combined with any other form of scholarship, grant, or waiver, the actual costs related to the survivor's or dependent's educational expenses allowed under this subsection.

4. The Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services shall designate a senior-level official who shall be responsible for developing and implementing the agency's strategy for disseminating information about the Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program to those spouses and dependents who may qualify. The Department of Veterans Services shall coordinate with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to identify veterans and qualified survivors and dependents. The Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services shall report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly as to the agency's policies and strategies relating to dissemination of information about the Program. The report shall also include the number of current beneficiaries, the educational institutions attended by beneficiaries, and the completion rate of the beneficiaries.