



TESTIMONY PROVIDED BY THE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TO THE PENNSYLVANIA SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS & EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE

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Presented by
Daniel M. Duffy, Executive Director of Military and Veterans Services
Community College of Allegheny County

Good Morning Chairman Regan, Chairwoman Williams, and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. My name is Dan Duffy, and I am the Executive Director of Military and Veterans Services at the Community College of Allegheny County. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you how CCAC is working to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our communities' military-affiliated students in achieving their educational goals. Our military-affiliated student population is comprised of our active duty service members, National Guard and reservists personnel, veterans, and their dependents and spouses.

The Community College of Allegheny County is a large multi-campus community college located within the Pittsburgh region, with a current student enrollment of approximately 45,000. With four campuses, four centers and numerous online course offerings, CCAC is able to provide the region's residents access to affordable and high quality education. The multi-campus structure allows the college to offer the same high quality services and support to all of the residents of Allegheny County as they pursue one of the nearly 160 programs of study across six diverse career paths that include: Arts & Humanities; Business; Education, Social &

Behavioral Sciences & Human Services; Health; Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM); and Skilled Trades. CCAC's campuses and centers make a multitude of services available to students which include academic advising, financial aid assistance, career counseling, job placement support, campus libraries, personal and academic counseling, tutoring, support for veterans and international students, and accommodations for individuals with documented disabilities.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' state summary from FY2017, Pennsylvania has the fourth largest veterans' population in the country, numbering approximately 820,000. Of these 820,000 veterans, there are approximately 60,000 female veterans and 100,000 veterans that are under the age of 40. Furthermore, only a small percentage of the 820,000 veterans are using Veterans Education Benefits—the report indicates that there are approximately 26,000 or only 3.2% of veterans currently using benefits. Of these 26,000 veterans, about one in every five veterans is using these educational benefits at one of the 14 community colleges statewide.

As the Executive Director of Military and Veterans Services for the Community College of Allegheny County, I am here to speak on behalf of CCAC about the support and services we are currently providing to approximately 500 military-affiliated students, who account for approximately 5% of the college's total current student enrollment. Approximately 400 of CCAC's veteran-affiliated students are either an active duty service member, a guard, a reservist or a veteran, with 72% male and 28% female and with an average age of approximately 31 years old. The other 100 students are either a dependent or spouse of a military service member or veteran. These statistics help to underscore why, as institution we are working so diligently to meet the needs of the entire military family as they transition from their military life to a post-military life.

The Community College of Allegheny County and the other 13 community colleges across the state are in a unique position to help Pennsylvania's military families. Community colleges provide a foundation for future success for both transitioning veterans and veterans who have been in the civilian workforce for some time. Community colleges provide pathways for

our veterans to meet both current and long-term needs. As veterans arrive on CCAC's campuses, they come with different motivations and goals. Some will use the community colleges as a springboard towards achieving their four-year degrees. In some cases, veterans entered military life following low academic success in high school. Therefore, community colleges provide an opportunity for veterans to regain the confidence they need to sustain long-term success in school. With smaller class sizes and more flexible class options, CCAC enables veterans to slowly integrate education into their current life. As a result, these students gain the needed skills required to advance into four-year programs. Other veterans may come to complete an associate degree in one of CCAC's many vocational/technical career programs where they can gain skills necessary to enter the workforce immediately. Finally, some veterans may arrive at our campuses with the desire to gain stackable, industry-recognized credentials to help enhance their previous education and military experience. Having these different pathways positions the state's community colleges to be a gateway to the attainment of higher education and also to employment.

At the Community College of Allegheny County, we are aware that our veterans have gone through formal military training beginning with basic training and then through their Advanced Individual Training (AIT). These trainings are recorded on an individual's military record and are available for review through the Joint Services Transcript (JST). The American Council on Education reviews the trainings completed and once reviewed, ACE will provide a recommendation of possible equivalents to traditional higher education curriculums. These recommendations provide service members and colleges some guidance on how their specific military trainings can be applied as prior credit at institutions. However, there are trainings that may not have been evaluated for credit by ACE and therefore no recommendations are available. The JST is available for service members to review at any time and is updated as new trainings are completed. During the service members' transition class—part of their separation from service—they are briefed on JST.

At CCAC, we recognize and value the formal training and schooling that our veterans have completed during their service. If students have taken courses at the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI) or through the American Council of Education's (ACE) approved

military training, they may apply to have their tests or courses count toward credit graduation at CCAC. The college recognizes and will grant credit for relevant coursework and/or training completed per the Joint Services Transcript. Many veterans are unaware that their military experience and training can provide them prior learning credits toward their degree. CCAC has awarded more than 1000 college-level credit hours for approximately 400 different ACE credit recommendations.

Discussions with veterans and college staff helped CCAC recognize that new veterans enrolling in the college were often unaware of these possible credits. To help ensure that as an institution we are able to meet the needs of new veteran students, the college application was updated to permit veterans to grant permission for the Office of Military and Veterans Services to request the JST electronically. With this new process in place, the college is able to receive the JST within days and evaluate it for possible transfer of credit. This creates a more transparent understanding for veterans as they begin the advising process and ensures that they receive applicable credits for their military training.

In order to meet the needs of current students who started before the update was applied to their application, CCAC's Office of Military and Veterans Services has created a form to allow veterans to have the college request their JST electronically. This helps eliminate confusion on how to obtain the transcripts on their own and provides CCAC's Office of Military and Veterans Service the ability to track the transfer process. Trainings have provided college advisors with an understanding of how to speak with veterans about the positive value of having the JST evaluated. If the transcripts have not been reviewed, they can download the request form, have veterans complete it, and then return it to the Office of Military and Veterans Services.

Initiatives like these are happening throughout all of the state's community colleges and moving forward, CCAC is committed to evaluating and implementing new strategies to help ensure that our veterans are receiving the applicable prior credit for their military experience. It has been an honor to speak in front of you today in relation to helping Pennsylvania's veterans pursue their higher education goals. In addition, I would like to express our support for the great

work that Chairman Regan, Chairwoman Williams, and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee are doing to help our state's veterans.

Thank you.