



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #706

Tribal College Reimbursement Program (Veterans Affairs)

CURRENT LAW

The tribal college reimbursement program was established by the 2013-15 biennial budget act to provide tuition assistance to veterans who are students at either the College of the Menominee Nation or the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College, and who meet certain income and academic standards. The program pays the tribal college tuition not paid by other any other grant or scholarship. The number of credit hours for which tuition assistance is provided depends upon the number of active duty hours served. Grants are funded with an appropriation of tribal gaming proceeds. Base funding for making grants is \$405,000.

GOVERNOR

Maintain base funding of \$405,000 PR annually for the tribal college reimbursement program.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The tribal college reimbursement program was modeled after the existing veterans tuition reimbursement program, which provides tuition assistance for veterans, but is funded with an appropriation from the veterans trust fund. The two tribal colleges do not meet the criteria for that program.

2. The tribal college reimbursement program was funded at \$405,000 annually, based on the assumption that 30 veterans attending Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College would qualify for grants, averaging \$4,500 per year (totaling \$135,000), and 45 veterans attending College of the Menominee Nation would qualify for grants, averaging \$6,000 per year (totaling \$270,000). However, to date, no students at the colleges have received grants.

3. Representatives of the colleges indicate that approximately eight to 10 veterans currently attend each college, but that currently their tuition costs are paid through federal veterans education programs (primarily the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill) and Bureau of Indian Affairs scholarship programs.

4. Since no funds have been expended from the tribal college tuition reimbursement program, the Committee could reduce this appropriation with little likelihood of affecting DVA's ability to fully fund grants to eligible applicants. Although federal education aid for veterans and Bureau of Indian Affairs programs currently provide aid that covers most eligible veterans at the two colleges, it is possible that these programs would not cover all tuition costs for some veterans at the colleges in the future. An appropriation of \$50,000 annually could be maintained in the event that some students qualify for assistance under the program. To provide this level of assistance, the appropriation reduction would be \$355,000 PR annually.

5. The effect of reducing the appropriation for the tribal college tuition reimbursement program would be to increase the amount of general fund revenue available for other purposes, since unallocated tribal gaming proceeds are deposited to the general fund at the close of each fiscal year.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Reduce the tribal college reimbursement program by \$355,000 PR annually, which would make available \$50,000 annually in the program. Increase general fund revenue by \$355,000 annually to reflect that this amount of tribal gaming revenue would remain unallocated.

ALT 1	Change to Bill
PR	- \$710,000
GPR-REV (Tribal)	\$710,000

2. Maintain the base appropriation for the tribal college reimbursement program of \$405,000.

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