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Research Brief

TO: Senator Bill Wielechowski
FROM: Katie Spielberger, Legislative Analyst *KS*
DATE: February 4, 2014
RE: National Guard Member Benefits in Alaska and Other States
LRS Report 14.180

You wished to know about the benefits that active and retired members of the National Guard receive in Alaska and how these compare to benefits received in other states.

All states, including Alaska, provide a wide range of benefits to active and retired members of the National Guard. We attach a 2011 National Governors Association report, "State and Territorial Support for Members of the National Guard, the Reserves and Their Families," which summarizes, for each state, the following types of benefits: family support; education benefits; licensing and registration benefits; tax and financial benefits; state employee benefits; protections, recognition, and employment support; and reintegration programs and initiatives. Although specific programs vary widely by state, all states offer some form of educational benefits, support to state employees in the National Guard, and support to families of Guard members. The majority of states also offer licensing and registration benefits, financial benefits, employment support, and reintegration programs. Below we outline some of the main benefits offered in Alaska as compared to other states. The attached report summarizes benefits in all states (see page 3 for Alaska information).

Tuition Assistance

Most states have some form of tuition assistance for National Guard members, and often for family members as well. Many states place limits on the amount of tuition assistance available and often restrict education benefits to state schools. Alaska provides up to 100 percent tuition and fee reimbursement for in-state educational or vocational training for the member (AS § 26.05.296) as well as free tuition and fees for a spouse or dependent of a member of the armed services, including the National Guard, if the member died in the line of duty (AS § 14.43.085). Some states offer benefits to a limited number of members: for example, California provides up to 100 percent of college tuition, fees, and expenses to 1,000 members a year.

Vehicle registration and licensing

At least three states—Hawaii, New Mexico, and Tennessee—provide free motor vehicle registration for members of the National Guard. In Virginia, National Guard members may receive special license plates for one-half the regular fee. At least 37 other states—including Alaska—offer special plates to members of the National Guard. These states charge the regular registration fee, and in most cases also charge a fee (typically between \$5 and \$25) for special plates. In Alaska, members of the National Guard pay the regular motor vehicle registration fee and may also purchase special plates for \$30.

Sport fishing and hunting licenses


In Alaska, active National Guard members and disabled veterans are eligible for free resident hunting and sport fishing license (AS § 16.05.341). Several other states also offer active members free licenses, including Kansas, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and New York. Alabama authorizes National Guard members on leave in the state the authority to hunt and fish without a license. Many states offer free or reduce fee licenses to disabled veterans.

Financial Benefits


The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) offers financing for qualified veterans at reduced interest rates (AS § 18.56.01) as well as certain property tax exemptions for qualified disabled veterans. Many other states offer property tax exemptions to disabled veterans. A significant financial benefit offered by most states is to exempt some portion of National Guard compensation from state income tax.

We hope this is helpful. If you have questions or need additional information, please let us know.

	<p>guarantees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When serving on military duty outside the state, military members and their dependents may register and receive an absentee ballot for voting in the county of their Alabama permanent address by completing the federal postcard application form.
Reintegration Programs/Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ALNG is fully compliant with the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program and reintegration programs for all Alabama Guardsmen returning from deployment are provided by the ALNG Solider and Family Support Services Division (334-271-7283).

ALASKA		Members	Spouses	Children	
	National Guard	3,773	2,266	4,244	
Governor: Sean Parnell	Reserves	1,015	570	807	
TAG: MG Thomas H. Katkus	Total	4,788	2,836	5,051	
Support to state employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reemployment rights • Military leave up to 15 days • Prohibition against discrimination • Continue health and life insurance benefits. • State employment hiring preference for veterans and NG/Reserve members • Military service may count toward vesting and retirement eligibility • Entitled to return to former employment position or a comparable position at the same pay, seniority and benefit level 				
Educational benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay tuition for surviving dependents or spouse of an armed services member who dies in the line of duty • Up to 100 percent tuition assistance at the University of Alaska for NG • Eligible for tuition reimbursement at other in-state schools • High School Diplomas for World War II Veterans 				
Family support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alaska NG Family Assistance Center offers Military Life Skills Groups, consultations, counseling, financial, legal, and child care resources, Operation Military Kids, Transition Assistance Advisors. • The State of Alaska Grant Program established to provide emergency financial assistance to NG members and families 				
Tax and financial benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Guard and Militia eligible for \$100 per month state retirement • Certain property tax exemptions for qualified disabled veterans • Veterans Land Discount program allows certain veterans a 25% discount on the purchase of state residential/recreational land • Under the Veterans Land Sale Preference, before unoccupied residential land is auctioned to the general public, veterans have the exclusive opportunity to purchase it at a restricted sale • Veterans Mortgage Program offers financing for qualified vets at lower interest rates • Veterans receive a one-percent lower interest rate on the first \$30,000 of a bank loan when purchasing a new home 				
Licensing, registrations and fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible for NG and veterans license plates • Complimentary state hunting and fishing licenses for NG members and certain disabled veterans • Free State Park Camping Pass for disabled veterans • Disabled veterans are entitled to an Alaska Marine Highway pass, which gives a 50% discount off the regular passenger fare 				
Protections, recognition and employment support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor's Veterans Advocacy Award • Birthday cards from the Governor are available to veterans aged 80 years and older • Military and Veterans Landmark Property Program formally recognizes memorials around the state built to honor the military and veterans • The Legacy Project honors all veterans by preserving letters written by soldiers on the front and letters written to them from home. 				

<p>Reintegration Programs/Initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Yellow Ribbon Program offers resource referrals, information, services and proactive outreach opportunities for Service Members, Veterans and their families. • Director of Psychological Health representatives advocate, promote and guide National Guard members and their Families by supporting psychological fitness for operational readiness. • The Transition Assistance Advisor (TAA) program serves as a statewide point of contact to assist Service Members, Veterans and their Families in accessing Veterans Affairs benefits and healthcare services. Provides assistance in obtaining entitlements through the TRICARE Military Health System and access to community resources. • The Veteran Service Officer program serves the veterans and transitioning military members in attaining the benefits offered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This program is administered through a grant to the following organizations; Veterans of Foreign Wars, The Military Order of the Purple Heart, The Vietnam Veterans Of America, The American Legion, and the Disabled American Veterans.
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<p>ARIZONA</p>	<p>Members</p>	<p>Spouses</p>	<p>Children</p>	
<p>National Guard</p>	<p>7,914</p>	<p>4,336</p>	<p>8,185</p>	
<p>Governor: Jan Brewer</p>	<p>Reserves</p>	<p>6,769</p>	<p>3,410</p>	
<p>TAG: MG Hugo E. Salazar</p>	<p>Total</p>	<p>14,683</p>	<p>7,746</p>	
<p>Support to state employees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 days paid military leave over consecutive two year period • No loss of time or efficiency rating • Receive pay difference between military pay and state pay if activated • Veteran preference for covered state employment 			
<p>Educational benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible for reimbursement of tuition and fees • Tuition waivers for Purple Heart recipients and dependents 			
<p>Family support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) - public/private partnership focused on building statewide capacity to care and support all who serve. Additional information available at: www.arizonacoalition.org • AZ National Guard Emergency Relief Fund provides emergency assistance in the form of grants and/or low interest loans • AZ Military Family Relief Fund, established to provide emergency assistance to service members and their families • Family Assistance Centers (FAC) – provide contact and support to families 24/7 via toll free phone number 800-233-7758 • Online Resource Information Network (ORIN) – database development for GFC-vetted community and governmental resources • Guidelines for Care (GFC) – identifying appropriate levels of care from the community at large in their service (counseling, legal, faith-based, etc.) provision to military and veteran Families • Joint Family Support Assistance Program (JFSAP) - personal financial consultation, Military OneSource coordination, Military & Family Life Consultants (MFLCs) counseling onsite • Director of Psychological Health - assists service members independent of their deployment status • Child and Youth Services Program Coordinators- coordinate statewide events in support of military children • Community and survivor Outreach Services Coordinators • Additional information about Arizona Family Programs can be found at: http://www.azguard.gov/Families/FamilyReadiness.htm 			
<p>Tax and financial benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor’s Homeland Heroes: businesses that offer financial assistance and discounted services to families of activated members • Earnings from National Guard duty exempt from state tax • Property tax exemption for widows, widowers, and disabled 			