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April 22, 2024

The Honorable Buffy Wicks
Chair, Assembly Appropriations Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8220
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB 2736 (Carrillo, J) - Veterans: benefits.
As introduced February 15, 2024 - SUPPORT**

Dear Assembly Member Wicks,

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), representing all 58 counties of California, I write in support of Assembly Bill (AB) 2736, which would improve access to higher education for family members of disabled veterans by allowing them to receive additional educational benefits at the same time as federal educational benefits or duplicate assistance from any other government source.

Improving access to higher education for family members of disabled veterans by allowing them to receive the California College Fee Waiver at the same time as Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) is important. California established the College Fee Waiver in 1935 to provide support for family members of disabled veterans who wanted to pursue higher education. Similarly, the DEA program was created by the federal government in 1956 and was meant to cover expenses outside the scope of tuition to help financially support the veteran's household. In 1972, a bill was passed that prohibited the acceptance of both benefits at the same time under College Fee Waiver Plan A, one of the four plans under which dependents may be eligible, despite the right to both forms of aid.

Spouses and children of disabled veterans with a 100% service-connected disability rating meet the eligibility requirements for both programs due to the severity of the veterans' injuries during their time of service. In acknowledgment of the valuable contributions and sacrifices made by veterans and their families, it is imperative to extend support to the spouses and children of disabled veterans. AB 2736 aims to rectify an outdated restriction that prevents beneficiaries covered under Plan A of the California College Fee Waiver from concurrently receiving monthly payments from the DEA program. By removing this prohibition, this bill seeks to improve accessibility to financial and educational assistance for these deserving individuals, thereby fostering greater opportunities for personal and professional advancement.

County Veteran Service Offices (CVSOs) frequently serve as the first point of contact in the community for veterans needing help in identifying federal, state, and local benefits accessible to them and their dependents. CVSOs assist with information regarding medical, pension, educational benefits, home loans, help with claims, advocacy, and more. CVSOs are critical to

providing California's veterans with the support and assistance they need to be able to take advantage of programs like DEA.

The economic challenges posed by factors such as increasing living expenses, escalating tuition fees, and the profound impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly heightened financial vulnerabilities for individuals. These circumstances have exacerbated the pressing need for individuals to receive multiple support programs that they are already entitled to. For veterans and their families, these economic pressures can be particularly burdensome considering the additional costs associated with disabilities and the unique circumstances they face stemming from their time of service. California recognizes the substantial benefits that higher education programs offer to veterans and their families. Therefore, there is a compelling imperative to eliminate barriers that impede access to both of these programs simultaneously.

AB 2736 offers individuals the opportunity to pursue higher education goals by removing outdated language in Section 896.1 of the Military and Veterans Code, the provision that does not permit spouses and children of disabled veterans with a one hundred percent service-connected disability rating to receive monthly payments concurrently from the DEA under Plan A of the California College Fee Waiver.

For these reasons, CSAC supports AB 2736, and we respectfully request your "AYE" vote. Should you have any questions regarding our position please do not hesitate to contact me at kdean@counties.org

Sincerely,



Kalyn M. Dean
Legislative Advocate

cc: The Honorable Juan Carrillo, California State Assembly District 39
Members, Assembly Appropriations Committee
Jay Dickerson, Chief Consultant, Assembly Appropriations Committee
Joe Shinstock, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus