



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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**MERIT AWARD SCHOLARSHIP FOR
SERVICE ACADEMIES**

**House Bill 4330 (Substitute H-1)
First Analysis (5-28-02)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Jerry VanderRoest
Committee: Education**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

High school graduates can seek the nomination of their member of Congress or U.S. Senator for an appointment to any of the four service academies: West Point (Army); Annapolis (Navy); Colorado Springs (Air Force); and Kings Point, NY (Merchant Marine). The fifth service academy for the Coast Guard (located in New London, CT) does not require a Congressional nomination. See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION*, below. The service academies offer a rigorous academic and physically intensive university-level program of study, and after four years the candidates earn highly regarded university degrees, often, although not always, in the sciences or engineering.

The nomination process to the service academies is very competitive, because the university education is very low-cost, or entirely free. Generally, candidates attend on full scholarship, because their tuition, room and board are fully subsidized by the federal government. However, after a candidate is accepted at a service academy, there often are fees and supplemental charges for items such as uniforms, equipment (for example, computers and calculators), medical examinations, or special training exercises. According to committee testimony the Coast Guard Academy has a one-time entrance fee of \$3,000. The U.S. Air Force, which provides a full scholarship and pays its cadets \$500 a month to attend) requires a \$2,500 fee for uniforms and a personal computer. The Naval Academy charges an entrance fee of \$2,200. The Merchant Marine charges midshipmen an annual fee that ranges from \$5,695 to \$5,821.

The five military academies are located out of state. If Michigan applicants are accepted they can use their Merit Award Scholarships to offset the fees. However, currently the law that establishes the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship Award Program limits the value of the Merit Award scholarship to \$1,000 for enrollment in an out-of-state post-secondary institution. In contrast, there is a \$2,500 Merit Scholarship Award for those who enroll in an

in-state college or university. Those who enroll out of state often lose the full value of the \$2,500 award, unless they subsequently enroll at an in-state post-secondary education institution within a seven-year time limit, in which case they are eligible for the remaining \$1,500 of the Merit Scholarship Award. [Note: Senate Bill 926 (H-1), which is under consideration by the House, would reduce the seven-year time limit to four years.]

The high school students who are accepted at the service academies are asked to serve their country about mid-way through their degree program, often after completing the second year of their four-year education. Most agree to enlist following graduation. Further, the candidates who are accepted at the service academies generally display laudable intellectual and physical discipline. One way to reward these students' commitment to military service and rigorous academic work would be to make the full \$2,500 Merit Award Scholarship Award available to them, despite the fact that the universities they attend are located out of state. Legislation has been proposed to do so.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4330 would amend the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship Act to extend the full \$2,500 scholarship now awarded to those who select an in-state post-secondary college or university, to those who attend the military academies, all of which are located out of state.

Currently, each Michigan student enrolled in grade 11 who meets certain academic requirements (in reading, writing, mathematics, and science) as measured by the Michigan Education Assessment Program, is eligible for the award of a \$2,500 Michigan merit award scholarship. The \$2,500 scholarship is awarded if the student is enrolled in an approved post-secondary educational institution in this state, or a \$1,000 scholarship is awarded if he or

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she is enrolled in an approved educational institution located outside the state. House Bill 4330 would also allow the \$2,500 award to be granted if a student enrolled in a service academy. The bill would add a definition of "service academy" to mean the United States Military Academy, United States Naval Academy, United States Air Force Academy, United States Coast Guard Academy, or United States Merchant Marine Academy.

[Note: A "conflict substitute" bill may have to be drafted for this bill, since it would amend sections of the Merit Award Scholarship Act that other legislation currently under consideration also would change. The bills amending the same sections, but doing so for different reasons, are sections 2 and 7 of House Bill 5880 (H-3) reported by the House Education Committee, and section 7 of Senate Bill 926 (H-1) reported by the House Appropriations Committee.]

MCL 309.1452 and 390.1457.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The requirements for making application to the U.S. service academies appear on the web sites of many members of Congress and U.S. Senators. Each state has an allotment of candidates that is proportionate to its representation in Congress. In Michigan, there are 15 Congressional districts and two U.S. Senators, so there is a total of about 68 possible candidates (17 elected officials multiplied by four service academies since the Coast Guard Academy does not require a politician's recommendation) over a four-year period. However, vacancies each year are limited and extremely competitive.

Although each elected official can design his or her own approach to screen and select candidates for nomination to the academies--many use a local advisory committee, for example--all members of Congress are authorized to have a maximum of five cadets or midshipmen attending the Air Force Academy, Military Academy (army), and Naval Academy at any one time. When a cadet or midshipman either graduates from or leaves an academy, a vacancy is created, and then that the member of Congress may fill it. Each member may nominate up to 10 candidates to be considered for each vacancy. Generally, each Congressional office has only one vacancy per year for each academy.

The forms that must be completed to seek a Congressional recommendation, and the forms that are needed to make application to each academy, can

also be found on most Congressional web sites. In addition, applicants can find descriptions of the selection protocols that are followed, as well as the eligibility requirements for each service academy.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill would increase the value of Merit Awards used by students enrolling in one of five military service academies from \$1,000 to \$2,500. The agency reports that data from the Merit Award Program staff indicate that 51 high school graduates from the Class of 2000 and 51 from the Class of 2001 earned Merit Awards and then enrolled in the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, and the U.S. Merchant Marines. Had they been eligible for a \$2,500 stipend rather than the customary \$1,000 out-of-state stipend, the state cost would have been about \$77,000 higher. The agency notes that since the service academies are selective in admissions, it is unlikely that the annual cost of this proposed change will exceed \$100,000 through 2008, when the number of Michigan high school graduates will peak and begin to decline due to demographic factors. (5-23-02)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The high school students who are accepted at the service academies are asked to serve their country about mid-way through their degree program, often after completing the second year of their four-year education. Most agree to enlist following graduation. Indeed, according to a graduate of West Point who serves in the Michigan legislature, most who graduate from the military academies enlist for a full tour of duty, and then in addition serve in the reserves throughout their adult lives. In addition to their military service, many graduates of the academies embody the principle of community service in other aspects of their lives, making a special effort to contribute their time and leadership skills to projects that improve the quality of life for all.

The young men and women who are accepted to study at the service academies generally display qualities of intellectual and physical discipline that far surpass the norm. One way to reward these students' commitment to military service and to rigorous academic work would be to make the full \$2,500 Merit Award Scholarship Award available to them, despite the fact that the universities they attend are located out of state.

POSITIONS:

The Allegan, VanBuren, and Tuscola Intermediate School Districts support the bill. (5-23-02)

The Traverse City Area Public Schools support the bill. (5-23-02)

Analyst: J. Hunault

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.