

New G.I. Bill Provides Financial Assistance Toward College Education For Post-9/11 Veterans

Veterans of active military service since 9/11/01 may qualify for additional financial assistance toward their education under a new GI Bill, which will take effect on August 1, 2009. The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 and its benefits were explained at an information session held April 23 at Springfield Technical Community College.

State Veterans Education staff from the Mass. Department of Higher Education George O'Connor and John Ebuon led the session, explaining the new educational benefits in what is known as Chapter 33 of the new GI Bill, and differentiating between those and the benefits currently available through previously existing chapters. Although benefits under the new bill will begin in August, veterans may begin filing applications for those benefits in May.

Carol Mathison, a counselor at STCC and one of the organizers of the new Veterans Support Group at STCC, said, "One of the many obstacles that veterans face in their return to school is sorting out all the various state and federal education-related resources, benefits, and services available to them, as they begin or continue their higher education. This seminar allowed military personnel as well as area college Veterans Affairs representatives to learn about the new G.I. Bill, so that informed decisions can be made about financial assistance."

She continued, "The most important fact that I came away with today is that the Post-9/11 GI Bill is still a work in progress, and it behooves every veteran who is considering using it to go to www.gibill.va.gov to determine which chapter would be the most beneficial to them."

Liz Almeida, VA certifying official at STCC, recommended that veterans check the following federal website for additional information, www.gibill.va.gov/GI_Bill_Info/benefits.htm#Ch33, or call the VA at 1-888-442-4551.

Almeida said, "Once veterans have determined which chapter is best for them, and have applied for their benefits at <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>, they should apply to an approved college or university. A list of approved institutions is available on the GI Bill website. Once they are accepted by the institution of their choice and are registered for classes, the next step would be to see their school certifying official to claim their benefits."