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Acting Governor Kim Guadagno Signs Legislation Creating Landmark VETeach Program To Help Veterans Become Teachers

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Trenton, NJ – Seeking to capitalize on the unique skills and experience of New Jersey's military veterans, Acting Governor Kim Guadagno today signed legislation creating a pilot program to assist post-9/11 veterans transition into teaching careers. The legislation, S-1026, creates a 36-month teacher preparation pilot program, called the "VETeach Pilot Program," at Richard Stockton College for veterans who served in the armed forces on or after September 11, 2001.

"New Jersey's veterans are among the most disciplined and highly trained members of the state's workforce. Our school districts will benefit in a very meaningful way by having these dedicated men and women apply their experience in the service of educating of New Jersey's children," said Acting Governor Guadagno. "Not only will these veterans serve our state in the classroom, their personal sacrifice on behalf of our nation serves as a great example to students about the meaning of service, community and dedication."

Veterans who successfully complete the program will receive a bachelor's degree and satisfy the requirements to apply for a certificate to teach grades kindergarten through eight, and in certain secondary education fields. Tuition for eligible students will be covered entirely by the federal "Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act," which provides 36 months of tuition benefits.

"Enactment of this legislation demonstrates a commitment by Governor Christie and Acting Governor Guadagno to support innovative programs that assist veterans transitioning from the military and into civilian life and civilian careers,"

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said Wendy Lang, project director for Operation College Promise, a national organization that assists veterans and veterans' service providers. "The VETeach program establishes a direct link between leadership skills our veterans gained through their service and their ability to contribute in the classroom."

Stockton plans to prepare future educators enrolled in the pilot program to teach "STEM" subjects – science, technology, engineering and math – fields that are critical for 21st century students. Enrollment for veterans is expected to begin during the fall 2012 semester.

"This program is a win-win-win for veterans, Richard Stockton College, and the school districts and students that will ultimately benefit from a new generation of enthusiastic and dedicated veteran teachers," said Dr. Harvey Kesselman, Stockton's provost. "We expect this program will be a great success, serve as a national model, and ultimately become a permanent part of our teacher education offerings."

"I am proud that Stockton College will launch this program – to our knowledge the first of its kind in the country – to serve our veterans. These future teachers have defended our way of life, and the VETeach program will empower them to access their American dream, all while serving our youth," said Rochelle Hendricks, Secretary of Higher Education. "This program will also help serve the important purpose of attracting more men and minorities into the teaching profession, where they can continue to build on their tradition of service to our country."

The Christie Administration has maintained a commitment to support New Jersey's veterans. On Tuesday, Acting Governor Guadagno and Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Hal Wirths kicked off the 'Operation Hire a Jersey Hero' Symposium, an event focused on promoting job opportunities for veterans by connecting employers with state resources available to support the hiring of veterans.

In his Fiscal Year 2013 Budget, Governor Christie is expanding the highly effective Veterans Haven program to serve veterans in the northern part of the state at the site of Hagedorn Psychiatric Hospital. Governor Christie has also signed various pieces of legislation to assist veterans, including bills to strengthen the support network for military families after the death of a service member; establish a program that awards high school diplomas to veterans who dropped out to serve in World War II, Korea and Vietnam; honor Gold Star Families with a special license plate for families of members of the military killed in action for their sacrifice; establish the New Jersey National Guard State Family Readiness Council Fund; ensure funding for the Veteran to Veteran Peer Support Program telephone helpline; and reinvigorate programs like Helmets2Hardhats to put veterans back to work.

Primary sponsors of S-1026 legislation include Senators Jim Whelan (D-Atlantic), Christopher J. Connors (R-Atlantic, Burlington and Ocean), Assemblymembers Mila M. Jasey (D-Essex and Morris), Wayne P. DeAngelo (D-Mercer and Middlesex), Cleopatra G. Tucker (D-Essex), Daniel R. Benson (D-Mercer and Middlesex), and Ruben J. Ramos, Jr. (D-Hudson).

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