



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 08-13

National Guard Youth Challenge Program

A. BACKGROUND

1. Youth—our nation's greatest asset and hope for the future—are dropping out of high school at the rate of one young person every 9 seconds.
2. Reports estimate 33 million Americans between the ages of 16 to 24 years do not have a high school degree. These "at-risk" youth are unlikely to find jobs within the new economy, and therefore their lack of education burdens the business and industrial community by slowing economic growth and productivity.
3. Twenty-eight states and Puerto Rico, with the National Guard as part of their community mission, conduct highly successful programs to help at-risk youth acquire essential life skills, education and employment potential, including supervised work experience in community service and education projects.
4. In particular, the National Guard Youth Challenge Program, through its quasi-military-style residential environment, offers at-risk youth not only a second chance to complete their formal education and to become physically fit, but also a controlled atmosphere that allows them to develop the self-discipline needed to maintain fundamental lifestyle changes that will ensure their future success.
5. The National Guard Youth Challenge Program is the only program of its kind that provides its graduates with a personal mentor for one year to help in the transition from a structured and disciplined environment to one of independence. The National Guard Youth Challenge Program is unique in that it focuses on at-risk males and females, ages 16-18, who are high school drop outs, who have proven themselves to be free from involvement in the criminal justice system, drug free and who have shown the necessary drive to complete their education and become contributing members of society.
6. Additionally, the National Guard Youth Challenge Program graduates have proven not only highly employable, but 80 percent attain their high school diploma or General Equivalency Degree (GED), 24 percent of these students choose to continue their education at a college or university, and since 1998, 20 percent have joined the U.S. Armed Forces to serve their country.
7. The interpretation of data from a comprehensive study at Vanderbilt University entitled "The Monetary Value of Savings for High Risk Youth" indicates that with an annual investment of \$50 million in the National Guard Youth Challenge program, the estimated annual savings to taxpayers are \$107 million in juvenile corrections costs; \$31.7 million in education costs; and \$6.8 million in military recruitment costs. Additional cost savings

are realized because 20 percent of the participants were able to leave federal assistance after completion of the program.

8. By comparison it is estimated to cost the federal government approximately \$14,000 for a young person to complete the National Guard Youth Challenge Program and it is estimated to cost approximately \$40,000 a year to put a young person through the juvenile corrections system.
9. The funding for this program – now provided by deferral funds allocated through the Department of Defense to support the National Guard’s community mission to participate and to support local, state and national programs that add value to America – continues to face opposition; and the discontinuance of federal funds will ensure the demise of the National Guard Youth Challenge Program and will remove a proven, successful opportunity to produce thousands of educated, highly motivated and productive young adults nationwide.

B. GOVERNORS’ POLICY STATEMENT

1. The Western Governors’ Association pledges full support for the efforts to seek ample federal funding from all appropriate agencies for the continuation and expansion of the National Guard Youth Challenge Program, making it possible for all interested states to participate in and reap the benefits of this valuable, life-changing program.
2. The Western Governors urge Congress to increase its share to 75 percent, the level appropriate for all other National Guard endeavors, to enable all states to offer this opportunity to their young people.
3. The Western Governors oppose any effort to move oversight and administration of the program from Department of Defense (DOD) and the National Guard, and urge Congress and the Administration to continue the program under its present structure.
4. The Governors believe a legislative mechanism should be developed at the federal level to produce sufficient funding for the continuation and expansion of the National Guard Youth Challenge Program and the furtherance of its inherent mission.

C. GOVERNORS’ MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVES

1. The Western Governors’ Association shall post this resolution to its Web site to be referred to and transmitted as necessary.
2. The Western Governors’ Association is directed to monitor progress toward achieving the policy objectives specified in this resolution and to report its findings and recommendations to the Western Governors.

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