

OREGON NATIONAL GUARD

Oregon National Guard Service Visibility and Data Alignment Act Proposal Package

1) The Story: Why This Matters to Oregon

A. What Oregon Asks of the Guard

Oregon relies on the Oregon National Guard as a state operational force. The Governor can and does activate ORNG for domestic missions that protect lives, property, and continuity of government, as seen during recent wildfire seasons, the COVID-19 pandemic response, and civil support operations.

B. What Oregon Currently Cannot Do

Oregon has no statewide requirement that state agencies ask whether a person has served or is serving in the military, including the National Guard. This lack of visibility is not just a data gap; it is a stewardship blind spot. It prevents the state from responsibly managing the well-being of a critical asset and understanding the downstream impacts of state-ordered activations on our citizens.

That means Oregon cannot answer basic stewardship questions like:

Are ORNG members using state behavioral health and crisis services at different rates than the general population?

Do activation cycles correlate with employment instability or education disruption?

Are prevention programs actually reaching Guard members and families, or are they missing them?

Are there geographic or demographic pockets where support is not landing?

Right now, the state cannot know in a measurable way, because the population is not consistently identified.

C. Why “Veteran” Doesn’t Solve It

Sometimes people assume 'veteran status' would identify the population, but Oregon law (e.g., ORS 408.225) defines 'veteran' using specific active-duty service criteria for benefit eligibility. Many Guard members serve their entire careers without lengthy federal active duty mobilizations, meaning they do not meet the legal definition of a veteran for many state and federal benefits. Therefore, this question does not reliably identify currently serving ORNG members or those whose service is primarily under state authority.

Even when the term “veteran” is used, the question fails to reliably identify currently serving ORNG members or those whose service is primarily under state authority.

D. What This Proposal Does

This proposal creates the missing infrastructure:

Oregon asks a simple, standardized service-history question statewide.

Oregon distinguishes National Guard service from other service components in the response options.

Oregon builds a protected, aggregate reporting pipeline so policymakers can see service utilization trends and gaps.

Oregon explicitly says this does not change eligibility for benefits.

This is a “see the people we rely on” policy. Not a benefits expansion.

E. A Proven, Standard Practice

The U.S. Census Bureau collects military service information specifically to estimate needs and support planning at community levels.

Oregon already uses self-identification + eligibility logic in public employment veterans’ preference, including (effective January 1, 2026) current/former ORNG servicemembers in that preference framework.

2) The Problem: Structural Invisibility

The core problem is structural invisibility:

- Oregon does not require consistent capture of military service history statewide.
- Many systems don't ask anything.
- Where questions exist, they are inconsistent and often use "veteran," which is not designed to capture current Guard status.

Result: Oregon cannot measure utilization, outcomes, or gaps for the ORNG population. This means Oregon is spending significant public funds on services without knowing if they are effectively reaching a critical state resource, representing a potential waste of taxpayer money and a risk to force readiness.

Why this matters right now

Oregon's reliance on ORNG for domestic missions has grown in complexity and tempo. These activations, while crucial for the state, can create significant stressors for Guard members and their families, including employment disruption, financial strain, and mental health challenges.

The state is investing in prevention, readiness, behavioral health, workforce resilience, and education support, but cannot evaluate whether those investments reach Guard members proportionately without identification infrastructure. This data gap represents a missed opportunity to proactively support the force and mitigate the negative impacts of service.

3) Objectives

This proposal aims to:

- Identify ORNG members and other military-connected people in state systems using a consistent question.
- Measure service utilization and outcomes in aggregate (not individually).
- Detect gaps in prevention reach, crisis access, workforce outcomes, education continuity, and family support touchpoints.
- Improve stewardship by aligning resources and policies to measurable needs.
- Protect privacy and avoid benefits expansion by design.
- Inform future policy by creating a foundational dataset that can guide legislative and agency-level decisions related to military and community support.

4) The Solution: How the Policy Works

A. Standardized question (required wording)

All covered agencies will use:

***"Have you ever served in the United States Armed Forces:
Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve?"***

B. Required Response Options (structured, not free text)

Minimum required categories:

- Currently serving – National Guard
- Previously served – National Guard
- Currently serving – Active Duty
- Previously served – Active Duty
- Currently serving – Reserve
- Previously served – Reserve
- No military service
- Prefer not to answer (recommended for sensitive contexts)

Why structured options matter: structured fields are usable for reporting and trend analysis; free text creates unusable data and privacy risk.

C. Targeted Implementation: Where It Matters Most

Minimum required implementation in:

- Oregon Health Authority enrollment and behavioral health intake points (including crisis system intake where feasible)
- Oregon Employment Department workforce services intake
- Department of Human Services intake for major programs
- Public higher education admissions and financial aid intake portals (public universities + community colleges)
- Public-facing benefits portals (e.g., ONE Oregon): To capture this data at the initial point of contact for a wide range of state services
- Department of Corrections intake and reentry planning systems
- Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) program intake systems, to identify service members who are not yet federally-defined "veterans."
- Department of Licensing and professional certification boards, (To better understand the professional landscape of the Guard force)

D. Data Governance and Reporting

A designated coordinating entity (such as the Office of the State Chief Data Officer or DAS Enterprise Information Services) will be responsible for publishing an annual statewide summary report that includes actionable recommendations for policymakers and agency leaders.

- publish the data standard (question + response codes)
- set minimum privacy protections
- require annual aggregate data feeds from agencies
- publish an annual statewide summary report

The report is aggregated only. No names. No individual-level public release.

E. Non-entitlement Clause

The statute must explicitly state: Military service identification collected under this law does not confer eligibility for any veteran benefit, preference, or entitlement unless separately established by law.

This is how you keep the bill fiscally and politically clean.

5) Defining Success: Measurable Outcomes

Outcomes you can measure within 12 – 36 months

Year 1: Visibility baseline

How many people in each system self-identify as current ORNG, former ORNG, etc.
Identification rates by agency and geography

Year 2: Utilization mapping

Behavioral health and crisis utilization patterns
Workforce utilization patterns
Education continuity patterns
Human services utilization patterns

Year 3: Trend + gap analysis

Where utilization is high relative to population estimates
Where utilization is low (potential access, stigma, awareness, or referral barriers)
Which prevention programs correlate with changes in utilization or outcomes

6) Real-World Impact: From Data to Decisions

Example 1: Crisis and behavioral health access

Scenario: Following a major wildfire season with repeated activations, the state sees a rise in crisis line calls and behavioral health intake. Without ORNG identification, Oregon cannot determine whether Guard members are disproportionately represented or whether tailored outreach is needed.

With this proposal, Oregon can answer:

- Are current ORNG members using crisis services at elevated rates after activations?
- Are referrals reaching them?
- Do we need targeted peer support or earlier intervention pathways?

Example 2: Workforce instability after activation

Scenario: A cohort of ORNG members experiences longer activations. Some have employment disruption. Oregon has workforce programs designed to stabilize employment but cannot tell whether Guard members are enrolling or being missed.

With this proposal, Oregon can measure:

- workforce program utilization by current/former ORNG status
- post-activation unemployment duration trends
- where targeted employer engagement may be needed

Example 3: Education interruption

Scenario: ORNG students in community colleges or universities face intermittent activation or training that disrupts terms. Schools may have supports but cannot quantify the population unless it's identified.

With this proposal, Oregon can track:

- ORNG student retention and completion patterns (aggregate)
- timing of disruption relative to known activation cycles (aggregate)
- effectiveness of policy supports (withdrawal policies, leave, re-enrollment support)

Example 4: Prevention program reach

Scenario: Oregon invests in prevention initiatives and resilience programs. Without identification infrastructure, the state cannot tell whether Guard members are participating proportionately or not.

With this proposal, Oregon can answer:

- participation rates (aggregate)
- program reach relative to estimated Guard population
- gaps by region or demographic group

Example 5: Family and Household Stability

Scenario: During a prolonged state activation, the families of Guard members may face increased stress, including financial strain or childcare challenges. State support services like SNAP, TANF, or childcare assistance programs could provide a crucial safety net.

With this proposal, Oregon can understand:

- Are households with a serving Guard member accessing family support services at different rates during activation cycles?
- This can inform targeted outreach to ensure the families of those who serve are also supported.

7) Implementation Plan

Phase 0: Governance setup (0 – 3 months after passage)

Appoint coordinating entity

Establish an inter-agency implementation working group with representatives from the covered agencies to facilitate communication and ensure smooth adoption.

Publish data standard (question + response codes + “prefer not to answer”)

Establish agency reporting schedule and privacy rules

Phase 1: System updates (3 – 12 months)

The coordinating entity will develop and distribute an implementation toolkit containing standardized form language, data field specifications for IT systems, and staff training scripts to ensure consistency and lower the burden on agencies.

Add the data field to electronic forms and portals

Update paper forms where still used

Train intake staff and publish standard scripts (simple and non-invasive)

Standard staff script example:

“We ask this so we can understand whether our services are reaching military-connected Oregonians, including the National Guard. It doesn’t affect eligibility for services.”

Phase 2: Baseline reporting (12 – 18 months)

First annual aggregate report

Data quality checks (missingness, inconsistent coding)

Phase 3: Utilization and gap reporting (18 – 36 months)

Trend analysis

Recommendations for targeted outreach or policy adjustments

8) Privacy, Risk, and Safeguards

Privacy risk

- Only aggregate reporting publicly
- Agency-level handling follows existing confidentiality rules
- “Prefer not to answer” option where appropriate
- Clear limitation: no use for enforcement or adverse eligibility decisions

Misinterpretation risk (benefits expansion fear)

- Explicit non-entitlement clause
- Explicit statement: informational, planning, and evaluation use

Data quality risk

- Structured codes only
- Standard training and scripts
- Annual data quality review by coordinating entity

IT and Administrative Burden risk (Some agencies may perceive this as an unfunded mandate)

- Implementation Plan emphasizes a low-friction approach
- Change requires adding a single coded data field
- Centralized toolkit and technical assistance from coordinating entity support

9) Fiscal Impact: A Low-Cost, High-Return Investment

What costs money

- One-time IT updates to add a field and store coded responses
- Minor modifications to paper/electronic forms
- Annual aggregate reporting compilation

What does NOT cost money

- It does not create a new benefit
- It does not mandate new services
- It does not change eligibility rules

This is a low cost, high impact data initiative that maximizes the return on existing state investments. By ensuring services effectively reach this critical population, the state can improve outcomes, enhance readiness, and potentially reduce long-term costs associated with crisis care, unemployment, or housing instability. It shifts the state from reactive spending to proactive, data-informed stewardship, ensuring that our support for the Guard is as reliable as their service to Oregon.

10) Conclusion: Fulfilling Our Pact with the Guard

Ultimately, the Oregon National Guard is not an abstract force; it is comprised of people. It is our neighbors, colleagues, and friends who balance civilian careers, family lives, and personal challenges with an unwavering commitment to serve the state in times of crisis.

This proposal closes a fundamental gap in our stewardship. For the first time, it allows the state to truly see the citizen-soldiers and airmen it relies upon as they interact with the very health, employment, and education systems designed to support all Oregonians.

By passing this Act, Oregon moves beyond guesswork. We replace assumptions with data, and reactive crisis management with proactive support. This visibility ensures that when we invest in services, those investments are reaching the families we ask to sacrifice so much.

This is more than a data initiative; it is an investment in force readiness and a fulfillment of a simple, profound pact: When the Guard answers the call to protect Oregon, Oregon will be ready and able to support them in return.

Appendices as follows:

A: Evidence and Comparable Models

B: Legislative Concept and Sponsor Review Draft

C: Governor's Policy Advisor Briefing Memo

D: Legislative Fiscal Office Narrative - Fiscal Impact Summary

E: Committee Testimony Script

F: Anticipated Questions and Strong Answers

Appendix A

Evidence and Comparable Models

A. State Law Models That Standardize Military Service Questions

California enacted Assembly Bill 258 (AB 258), adding Government Code § 11019.11, effective July 1, 2014. This law requires all state agencies that include a question on forms or websites about veteran status to ask it in a specific wording:

“Have you ever served in the United States military?”

This seemingly simple change matters because the traditional term “veteran” is legally defined in federal and state benefit programs based on criteria such as active-duty length, deployment status, and discharge type. Many Guard and Reserve members who served honorably may not meet those criteria but will answer “yes” to having served in the military. Asking the service-history question ensures capture of a wider set of individuals who have military experience, not just those meeting a legal veteran definition.

The law applies to any written form, publication, or web questionnaire newly printed after the effective date, and is intended to promote more inclusive data collection while standardizing how agencies identify military service.

B. California’s Application in HR Systems

California’s Department of Human Resources uses the AB 258 standardized question in its internal employee surveys to identify military service for equal employment opportunity reporting and demographic analysis, recognizing that the broader service question captures more than just federal veterans as legally defined.

There’s no single statewide mandate in California requiring all data systems to collect this information in a central repository or report it to a coordinating office. The law’s focus is on standardized wording only.

C. Context for Why “Service-History” Questions Matter

The legal definition of “veteran” varies by benefit program and often depends on active-duty service minimums, deployment, and discharge conditions. Under federal definitions used by VA benefit programs, National Guard or Reserve service without qualifying active-duty activation may not meet veteran status, even though the individual has military experience.

State agencies and employers that rely solely on “Are you a veteran?” may undercount service members, especially Guard and Reserve components. Standardizing the wording to inquire about any military service increases identification of previously under-recognized populations.

D. Broader State Legislative Trends

While comprehensive data on all states’ “ask the question” laws isn’t centrally catalogued, states frequently adopt bills related to military and veterans affairs across diverse policy areas (employment protections, education benefits, licensing, and service member support). A 2022 survey noted that 40 states enacted a total of 152 military and veterans-related bills, highlighting ongoing legislative activity affecting service members and veterans.

California’s standardized service question law remains one of the clearest examples of a statutory requirement that shapes how public entities identify military service history, irrespective of whether the respondent meets legal veteran benefit definitions.

Appendix B

Legislative Concept and Sponsor Review Draft

This bill creates a statewide, standardized way for Oregon agencies to identify military service history, including current and former Oregon National Guard members, so Oregon can measure service utilization and gaps and align prevention and readiness supports. It does not expand benefits or change eligibility rules.

Sponsor “what you can say”

“Oregon relies on the Guard in emergencies, but we don’t consistently know whether Guard members are being reached by the services we fund. This bill creates a simple, consistent way to identify Guard service in state systems so we can measure what’s working, find gaps, and take better care of the people who take care of Oregon.”

Legislative concept draft - Relating to standardized military service history identification; and declaring an emergency.

SECTION 1. Definitions.

- (1) “Military service” means service in the United States Armed Forces, including Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve components.
- (2) “State agency” means any executive branch department, division, bureau, board, commission, or other entity.

SECTION 2. Standardized military service history question.

- (1) Each state agency shall include the following question on specified intake, application, enrollment, and demographic collection instruments, including electronic forms:
“Have you ever served in the United States Armed Forces (Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve)?”
- (2) The agency shall provide structured response options that include, at minimum, the following categories:
 - (a) Currently serving – National Guard
 - (b) Previously served – National Guard
 - (c) Currently serving – Active Duty
 - (d) Previously served – Active Duty
 - (e) Currently serving – Reserve
 - (f) Previously served – Reserve
 - (g) No military service
 - (h) Prefer not to answer, as appropriate to context

SECTION 3. Covered systems.

At a minimum, this requirement applies to:

- (1) Oregon Health Authority enrollment and behavioral health intake systems;
- (2) Oregon Employment Department workforce intake systems;
- (3) Department of Human Services major program intake systems;
- (4) Public postsecondary education admissions and financial aid intake systems;
- (5) Department of Corrections intake and reentry planning systems.

SECTION 4. Data governance and reporting.

- (1) The [designated coordinating entity] shall issue a statewide data standard and reporting guidance.
- (2) Each covered agency shall provide annual aggregate reports to the coordinating entity.
- (3) The coordinating entity shall publish an annual statewide summary report using aggregate data only.

SECTION 5. No change in eligibility.

Collection of military service history under this Act does not confer eligibility for any veteran-related benefit, preference, or program unless otherwise provided by law.

SECTION 6. Emergency clause.

This Act takes effect on passage for purposes of rulemaking and implementation.

Appendix C

Governor's Policy Advisor Briefing Memo

Subject: Oregon National Guard Service Visibility and Data Alignment Act
Decision needed

Support development and sponsorship of a bill requiring standardized military service history identification across key state systems to improve ORNG stewardship, prevention targeting, and readiness oversight.

Why this matters to the Governor

The Governor commands ORNG in state emergencies. Oregon currently lacks consistent visibility into Guard members' interactions with state systems. This limits Oregon's ability to align support, evaluate prevention reach, and manage readiness impacts tied to activation cycles.

What's broken today

No statewide requirement to ask about service history. Agencies are inconsistent. "Veteran" is a legal category that does not reliably identify current Guard members.

What the bill does

- Standardizes a service-history question and response options
- Requires implementation in high-impact systems
- Creates aggregate reporting and annual statewide summary
- Protects privacy
- Explicitly does not expand benefits or eligibility

Why it's low risk

- Non-entitlement clause
- Aggregate-only reporting
- Minimal operational burden (one-time form/system updates)

What it unlocks

- Better prevention planning and evaluation
- Better readiness oversight
- Better alignment of existing resources
- Ability to show measurable stewardship of ORNG members

Appendix D

Legislative Fiscal Office Narrative - Fiscal Impact Summary

This measure requires certain executive branch agencies to add a standardized military service history question and structured response codes to intake and application systems and to provide annual aggregate reporting.

One-time costs

- IT configuration to add a coded data field in specified systems
- Updates to online and paper forms
- Training materials and staff instruction

Ongoing costs

- Annual aggregate data compilation and submission
- Limited staff time for data quality checks and report production

Key fiscal clarifiers

- No new services mandated
- No benefit eligibility expansion
- No entitlement creation

Value proposition

The measure improves evaluation and targeting of existing investments in prevention, workforce support, education continuity, and crisis response by making the ORNG population visible in aggregate.

Appendix E

Committee Testimony Script

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Oregon depends on the Oregon National Guard. When disasters hit, the Guard shows up for Oregon. But Oregon does not consistently see the Guard in Oregon's own systems.

There is no statewide requirement for agencies to ask whether someone is currently serving or has served in the National Guard or military. Many systems do not ask at all. Some use the term "veteran," which is a legal category that does not reliably capture currently serving Guard members.

That means Guard members can move through Oregon's health, behavioral health, workforce, education, and family support systems without being recognized as the population the state activates during emergencies.

This bill fixes that structural gap.

It requires one simple question across key systems:

"Have you ever served in the United States Armed Forces, including Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve?"

It includes structured response options that allow Oregon to identify current and former National Guard service.

- It does not expand benefits.

- It does not change eligibility rules.

- It does not create new entitlements.

It creates visibility.

With visibility, Oregon can finally measure whether Guard members are being reached by the services the state already funds, where gaps exist, and what trends look like after major activation periods.

The logic is straightforward: if we can't identify the population, we can't measure outcomes or target support responsibly. The Census Bureau uses the same principle in collecting military service data to understand needs and plan services.

Oregon asks the Guard to be there for the state. This bill ensures Oregon can more responsibly be there for them. Thank you, and I urge your support.

Appendix F

Anticipated Questions and Strong Answers

“Is Oregon collecting veteran status today?”

Generally, Oregon is not required statewide to collect it. Some systems may ask something, some do not. That inconsistency is the core gap this bill fixes.

“How does this help the average Oregonian?”

This bill ensures that our friends, neighbors, and colleagues who step up to serve in the National Guard during emergencies are supported. It guarantees that our state tax dollars, which fund vital health, employment, and education services, are being used effectively and reaching the very people we ask to protect our communities.

“Why not just ask ‘Are you a veteran?’”

Because “veteran” is a legally defined term in Oregon law and does not reliably identify currently serving Guard members.

“Is Oregon already doing anything similar?”

Yes, in a limited domain: public employment preference relies on self-identification and eligibility logic, and Oregon guidance reflects inclusion of current/former ORNG servicemembers effective Jan 1, 2026.

“Won't this create more bureaucracy?”

On the contrary, this proposal is designed to increase efficiency. It replaces an inconsistent patchwork of unusable data with a single, streamlined standard. By providing clear, aggregate data, it allows agency leaders and legislators to make more effective decisions, reducing wasted effort and targeting resources where they are needed most.

“Do other jurisdictions do this?”

Yes. California standardized wording across agencies to a service-history question to reduce under-identification.

“Is this a veterans benefits bill?”

No. It explicitly does not change eligibility for any veteran benefit or preference.

“Is this a privacy issue?”

No public release of personal data. Only aggregate reporting. Plus “prefer not to answer” where appropriate.