



VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON
PENDING AND DRAFT LEGISLATION

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

April 9, 2019

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Bilirakis, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Veterans Education Success (VES) appreciates the opportunity to share its perspective on the hearing for Draft Legislation before the Subcommittee.

VES is a non-profit organization focused on protecting the integrity and promise of the GI Bill and other federal educational programs for veterans and servicemembers.

DRAFT – Flight Training Schools

The purpose of the Post 9/11 GI Bill is to aid service members and veterans in the transition from military service into the civilian workforce. Since its inception, thousands of military-connected students have had the opportunity to take advantage of this generous benefit in hopes of increasing their economic mobility and the socioeconomic standing of their families. Unfortunately, some schools have also taken advantage of veterans' benefits in a way that is less than admirable. This has been the case for certain flight schools, which is why Veterans Education Success supports the intent of this bill.

With the overall amount of GI Bill money going to flight school training dropping from \$79.8 million in 2014 to \$48.4 million in 2016, it is evident that VA has made commendable progress in tightening the oversight and execution of reimbursement of costs to flight training schools for enrolled veterans. While this work by VA is commendable, we believe this type of oversight uses valuable resources that would be better focused in other areas. Similar to the annual tuition and fees cap for private institutions of higher learning (IHL), the cap recommended in this bill offers an amenable solution, especially if schools opt to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program.

According to data provided by VA, the average tuition for veterans attending 86 of the 102 schools that received GI Bill money for flight training in 2016 was below the \$22,800 proposed cap (the 2017/18 national maximum for private schools). For 7 of the 16 remaining schools, the cost was slightly above the cap. With this proposed bill, should these schools choose to match half of the tuition gap by participating in the Yellow Ribbon program, VA would match the other half and veterans would be able to successfully complete their training without needing to take on additional student loan debt.

Despite the large number of institutions who provide flight training at costs around \$22,800 per student per year, in FY16 the VA reported a number of schools charging \$130,000, on average. While representatives from these schools argue this type of training is costly due to high-end equipment, the cost for similar training at 61% of the schools who accepted GI Bill benefits was significantly lower. This is concerning at best. To continue to pay these schools at such high costs is not an appropriate use of tax payer money.

While Veterans Education Success supports the intent of the bill and a cap similar to that already in existence for private IHLs, we are concerned about the proposal to offer accelerated payments for those choosing to attend these schools. Accelerated payments burn through a student's benefits, leaving them without the opportunity to finish a college degree. Given the availability of the Yellow Ribbon Program, VES does not believe that accelerated payments are a necessary solution to covering the extraneous costs of certain flight training programs.

Additionally, if VA were to be allowed to pay for a private pilot's license, we recommend the proposed legislation be amended to continue to require the medical clearance mandated by law to allow someone to become a pilot. Otherwise, it will be a waste of tax payer dollars and the students' benefits if they pursue this training and then are unable to use it.

H.R. 1718 - GI Education Benefits Fairness Act

This bill creates alignment with the language in Section 1072(2)(I) for dependents of service members for the purposes of transferring education benefits. VES supports this bill as it provides parity for what is already happening within the Department of Defense for dependents.

DRAFT - Veteran Employment and Child Care Access Act of 2019

One contributing factor to non-completion in higher education is lack of childcare. Military-affiliated students are often nontraditional students who have. Lack of childcare should not impede their ability to pursue post-secondary education leading to viable employment. We understand from the Committee that this bill will ensure the existing childcare is much more comprehensive. We also understand from VA that VA believes the bill is not necessary because it duplicates the existing program. While we are not sufficiently familiar with the details of the existing program to assess the merits of VA's position, we do know that student veterans need childcare and everything possible should be done to ensure they have access to it.

DRAFT – VET OPP Act

The office of Economic Opportunity is a proactive approach to supporting veterans and their families as they transition from military service into the civilian workforce. It is important they have a more prevalent voice that can speak and advocate on their behalf, especially during the point of transition. The recent challenges VA faced in the implementation of the Harry W. Colmery Act reinforces the need for a fourth administration whose sole focus is the office for Economic Opportunity. That is why VES supports this bill.

DRAFT – Amendment of the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship

Often students pursuing a degree within a STEM field must add an extra year to their education due to the timing of courses offered and the prerequisites necessary to complete these programs. This has discouraged some students from pursuing a degree in STEM, despite the high demands for trained professionals in the American workforce. The original intent of the law was to provide an extra year of GI Bill benefits to address this issue. Unfortunately, the current credit requirement misses the intent of the law and makes it impossible for the majority of programs to meet eligibility. This bill addresses this and returns to the original intent by removing the credit hour requirement for a degree program. VES supports this change and believes military-affiliated students are strong candidates for helping fill this significant gap within the workforce.

Discussion Draft - In State Tuition

Part of a student's ability to make an informed decision related to his or her choice of higher education requires full transparency of the cost of attendance and whether or not he or she will qualify for in-state tuition. This legislation would help with that transparency.

Discussion Draft – Expansion of the Fry Scholarship

Children and spouses of the members of the reserve components who die of a service-connected disability should have access to the Fry Scholarship. This bill makes it available to them.

We appreciate the amount of time, effort, and attention the Committee has given to ensure military-connected students receive optimal training and education for a successful career in the civilian workforce. Thank you for considering the views of VES on this important topic.