

**House Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Legislative Hearing on  
Educational Assistance Provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for Flight Training Programs  
October 11, 2017**

**Statement of Helicopter Association International**

**Submitted by:  
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Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the Subcommittee, Helicopter Association International (HAI) thanks the subcommittee for holding a hearing on the important issue of educational assistance provided to veterans for flight training.

HAI unequivocally supports financial assistance to veterans for flight training programs. With this help, veterans receive the training necessary to transition to a career in the civilian aviation industry.

From a personal perspective, I know the life changing effect the Veterans flight training program can have on one's life. Upon my return from Vietnam as an Army helicopter pilot I utilized the Veterans flight training program to expand my overall piloting capabilities. That action had a direct beneficial effect on my 50-year aviation career.

The U.S. civilian general aviation sector generates more than one million jobs and more than \$200 billion for the nation's economy — and it is seeking pilots. Today's flight training programs prepare tomorrow's pilots of police and firefighting helicopters, air ambulances, charter and corporate aircraft, and airliners.

Being a civilian commercial pilot is a rewarding career. However, it requires thorough, in-depth, and complex training. Learning to fly a helicopter is even more expensive than fixed-wing training because of the high costs associated with operating a **complex** rotorcraft.

HAI believes that that as a nation, we have an obligation to meet the needs of veterans by keeping the promises made to them, including providing financial assistance to help them achieve their educational goals. We applaud the members of the Veterans' Committee for their efforts to ensure veterans receive the benefits they have earned by stepping forward in our nation's defense.

HAI's goal is to ensure an outcome that supports veterans in their transition to the civilian economy while endorsing the creation and administration of fiscally sound, flexible, and responsive flight training benefit programs for this deserving group.

HAI supports the need for improved fiscal responsibility by the government and strongly supports tightening the existing regulations of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to curb recent abuses by a minority of flight schools affiliated with collegiate degree programs. We applaud the committee's determination to strike a balance between providing opportunity for veterans while controlling excessive costs.

HAI also supports congressional efforts to provide greater flexibility and more efficient funding mechanisms to help veterans complete their flight training. Long industry experience has demonstrated that flight training over a shorter time is more economical and effective for the student pilot than the same amount of training over an extended period. Consideration of accelerated payments is one option that allows veterans a more effective and economical path to flight training.

Caps on payments for flight training tuition and fees unfairly impact the ability of veterans to pursue well-paying jobs in the civilian aviation sector. These caps deprive them of the ability to pursue collegiate flight training, a common path to a career as a commercial helicopter pilot.

Tools like the Yellow Ribbon Educational Enhancement Program (YRP) are helpful in offsetting costs that exceed current VA educational caps. Participating institutions agree to cover a portion of the difference between the tuition and the amount of VA coverage. The VA matches the institution's contributions to further reduce or eliminate the veteran's out-of-pocket expenses.

This program would not be necessary if caps on flight training were removed. However, with caps in place, YRP can be an effective tool to extend the resources available to veterans.

Finally, HAI supports allowing VA benefits to be used for veterans as they train to obtain a private pilot license. Obtaining this certificate is the required first rung on the ladder to a career as a commercial pilot. Placing this financial stress solely on our veterans means fewer and fewer will be able to pursue a commercial helicopter pilot career.

Requiring veterans to cover the costs associated with their private pilot license is a discriminatory financial burden that most veterans can ill afford. Removing this financial impediment would be a positive step toward providing veterans with the tools they need to transition to a civilian aviation career.

HAI applauds today's dialogue and discussion. We appreciate the leadership's willingness to listen to our perspective and consider our position. HAI remains committed to working with the Veterans' Affairs Committee and all of Congress to ensure our nation delivers on its commitment to our veterans who have honorably and unselfishly served our nation.