



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

OCTOBER 11, 2017

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Veterans Education Success (VES) appreciates the opportunity to share its perspective on the DRAFT legislation before the Subcommittee: To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements to the use of educational assistance provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for flight training programs.

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.

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.

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.