

DELIVERING DIGITALLY TO OUR VETERANS ACT OF 2025

SEPTEMBER 9, 2025.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. BOST, from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs,  
submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 3481]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 3481) to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide for electronic communication relating to educational assistance benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment and recommends that the bill as amended do pass.

CONTENTS

	Page
Purpose and Summary .....	2
Background and Need for Legislation .....	2
Hearings .....	4
Subcommittee Consideration .....	5
Committee Consideration .....	5
Committee Votes .....	5
Committee Correspondence .....	5
Committee Oversight Findings .....	5
Statement of General Performance Goals and Objectives .....	5
New Budget Authority, Entitlement Authority, and Tax Expenditures .....	5
Earmarks and Tax and Tariff Benefits .....	5
Committee Cost Estimate .....	6
Congressional Budget Office Estimate .....	6
Federal Mandates Statement .....	7
Advisory Committee Statement .....	7
Constitutional Authority Statement .....	7
Applicability to Legislative Branch .....	8
Statement on Duplication of Federal Programs .....	8
Disclosure of Directed Rulemaking .....	8
Section-by-Section Analysis of the Legislation .....	8
Changes in Existing Law Made by the Bill, as Reported .....	9

The amendment is as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

**SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

This Act may be cited as the “Delivering Digitally to Our Veterans Act of 2025”.

**SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENT TO CERTAIN OUTREACH UNDER SOLID START PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

Section 6320(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1)(B)—

(A) by striking “calling” and inserting “communicating with”; and

(B) by inserting “through the use of tailored lines of communication, including mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging” after “Armed Forces”; and

(2) in paragraph (2), by striking “tailored mailings” and inserting “tailored lines of communication, including mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging,”.

**SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS USE OF TAILORED LINES OF COMMUNICATION FOR CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE BENEFITS.**

Section 3680 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(i)(1) The Secretary shall provide a mechanism by which an eligible veteran or eligible person may use tailored lines of communication to send and receive correspondence with the Department of Veterans related to entitlement to and use of educational assistance benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary. The Secretary shall ensure that an eligible veteran or eligible person is provided with an opportunity to opt into sending and receiving such correspondence using such lines of communication rather than by mail.

“(2) The Secretary shall provide to eligible veterans and eligible persons who are enrolled in a course or program of education or training notice of the opportunity to opt in to sending and receiving correspondence using tailored lines of communication pursuant to paragraph (1).

“(3) In this subsection, the term ‘tailored lines of communication’ includes mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging.”.

**SEC. 4. EXTENSION OF CERTAIN LIMITS ON PAYMENTS OF PENSION.**

Section 5503(d)(7) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “November 30, 2031” and inserting “January 31, 2033”.

**PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

H.R. 3481, the “Delivering Digitally to Our Veterans Act of 2025” was introduced by Representative Tom Barrett of Michigan on May 19, 2025. The bill, as amended, would allow veterans to opt-in to receive digital messaging on all education benefit communications.

H.R. 3386, the “Streamlining the Solid Start Communications Act” introduced by Representative Derrick Van Orden of Wisconsin on May 14, 2025. This bill would allow the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Solid Start program to communicate via digital messaging if the veteran is unreachable via phone calls.

**BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION**

*Section 1: Short Title*

This Act may be cited as the “Delivering Digitally to Our Veterans Act of 2025”.

*Section 2: Improvement To Certain Outreach Under Solid Start Program of Department of Veterans Affairs*

VA implemented the Solid Start program as a proactive outreach program to help support veterans as they transition from their service into civilian life by calling veterans three separate times (90, 180, and 365 days) throughout their first year of transition.

Studies have shown that the first-year post service is the most difficult time period for veterans' overall mental health due to the various challenges this major life change may present. Committee oversight hearings have also revealed that it takes several years for a veteran to feel fully transitioned, with some veterans never feeling fully transitioned to civilian life.

Solid Start is an outreach initiative designed to assist transitioning servicemembers as they become veterans, managed by VA's Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), which oversees the benefits and services provided to veterans. Servicemembers are introduced to Solid Start as part of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), a largely mandatory program aimed at helping separating servicemembers get ready for their transition to civilian life.<sup>1</sup> During phone calls, Solid Start representatives share information on specific benefits, as well as offer personalized guidance based on the veteran's needs and interests. Such examples include providing information on access to VA benefit programs, mental health resources, and specific information for women veterans.

Currently, VA only has the authority to call a veteran to disseminate Solid Start information. This section would expand outreach methods from VA to veterans by increasing the ways VA can reach out to veterans within the Solid Start Program. This section would grant VA the authority to digitally communicate with veterans by means other than a phone call. Through this section individuals would receive information relevant to them through mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging. During a prior meeting VA mentioned that the younger generation of veterans pick up the phone significantly less than senior veterans. In VA's 2024 Solid Start Program data, the contact rate was 77.66% for all servicemembers, that number dropped to 55.53% for the 18–22 age demographic of transitioning servicemembers. All age groups outside of the 18–22 and the 23–27 groups had an over 80% successful contact rate. The Committee believes that to reach the youngest generation of veterans, VA must use the mode of communication these veterans are most comfortable with. This section if enacted would give VA the flexibility to accomplish that goal.

*Section 3: Department of Veterans Affairs Use of Tailored Lines of Communication for Correspondence Relating to Educational Assistance Benefits*

The Digital G.I. Bill (DGIB) is a modernized platform for veterans to see their education benefits online and allow VA to communicate in real time. In the current version of DGIB veterans are receiving communication relating to education assistance through traditional mail. This section would allow veterans to opt-in to receive education benefit communications through digital messaging instead of receiving information via traditional mail. This would allow veterans and dependents to access their education benefits and communications information more efficiently and in a modernized format. Instead of waiting potentially weeks for mailed communications, which sometimes are delivered to an outdated address because that is the location VA has in their profile, the individual

<sup>1</sup> gao-23-105699(8).pdf.

would receive communication significantly faster and always have access to the correspondence saved digitally. The Committee believes that this section is greatly needed to allow veterans to receive their information in a more effective, streamlined way to ensure access to the best care and services.

*Section 4: Extension of Certain Limits on Payments of Pension*

Under current law (38 U.S.C. § 5503(d)), the amount of VA pension paid to veterans having no spouse or child, veterans' surviving spouses having no child, and veterans' children who are admitted to a VA or Medicaid sponsored nursing facility is capped at \$90 a month. This section would cover the costs of the other sections of this bill by extending this pension limitation from November 30, 2031, to January 31, 2033. Because they receive government sponsored care in a nursing home, these pension beneficiaries do not require the full amount of pension to cover their cost of living. The Committee believes this short-term extension of the current limit on pension payments is a reasonable way to cover the costs associated with the other sections of this bill.

HEARINGS

On June 11, 2025, the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a legislative hearing on a number of bills, including H.R. 3481.

The following witnesses testified:

Dr. Liz Clark, Acting Director, Defense Support Services, U.S. Department of Defense, Mr. Nick Pamperin, Executive Director, Veterans Readiness and Employment, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, who was accompanied by Mr. Thomas Alphonso, Assistant Director of Policy and Implementation, Education Service, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Andrew Petrie, Senior Policy Analyst, Veterans Education and Employment Division, The American Legion, Mr. Blaze Smith, Director, Veterans Education and Transition Center, The University of Arizona, Mr. Matthew Schwartzman, Director, Legislation and Military Policy, Reserve Organization of America, Ms. Ashlynn Haycock-Lohmann, Director, Government and Legislative Affairs, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS).

The following individuals and organizations submitted statements for the record:

Dr. Joseph W. Wescott, National Legislative Liaison, National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA), Mr. Will Hubbard, Vice President for Veterans and Military Policy, Veterans Education Success (VES), Ms. Julie Howell, Associate Legislative Director for Governmental Relations, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), Mr. Jake Fales, Senior Policy Fellow, and Hannah Miller, Policy and Communications Fellow, Reserve Organization of America (ROA), Ms. Tammy Barlet, Vice President of Government Affairs, Student Veterans of America (SVA), Ms. Kristina Keenan, Director, National Legislative Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW).

## SUBCOMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On July 3, 2025, the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity was discharged from further consideration of this legislation.

## COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On July 23, 2025, the full Committee met in open markup session, a quorum being present, and ordered H.R. 3481, as amended, to be reported favorably to the House of Representatives by voice vote. During consideration of the bill, the following amendment was considered and agreed to by voice vote:

An amendment in the nature of a substitute offered by Representative Barrett of Michigan, which added H.R. 3386, the “Streamlining the Solid Start Communications Act” to the bill as amended and provided an offset for the cost of the bill using the pension offset. This amendment in the nature of a substitute was agreed to by voice vote.

A motion by Ranking Member Takano of California to report H.R. 3481, as amended, favorably to the House of Representatives, was adopted by voice vote.

## COMMITTEE VOTES

In compliance with clause 3(b) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, there were no recorded votes taken on amendments or in connection with ordering H.R. 3481, as amended, reported to the House.

## COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS

In compliance with clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII and clause (2)(b)(1) of rule X of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee’s oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the descriptive portions of this report.

## STATEMENT OF GENERAL PERFORMANCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In accordance with clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee’s performance goals and objectives are to use more effective and streamlined technologies to reach all veterans so they can receive the care, services, and education they are entitled to.

NEW BUDGET AUTHORITY, ENTITLEMENT AUTHORITY,  
AND TAX EXPENDITURES

In compliance with clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee adopts as its own the estimate of new budget authority, entitlement authority, or tax expenditures or revenues contained in the cost estimate prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.

## EARMARKS AND TAX AND TARIFF BENEFITS

H.R. 3481, as amended, does not contain any Congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in clause 9 of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

## COMMITTEE COST ESTIMATE

The Committee adopts as its own the cost estimate on H.R. 3481 as amended, prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.

## CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the following is the cost estimate for H.R. 3481, as amended, provided by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974:

<b>H.R. 3481, Delivering Digitally to Our Veterans Act of 2025</b> As ordered reported by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs on July 23, 2025			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2025	2025-2030	2025-2035
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	0	-56
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	0	-56
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	0	54	54
Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply? Yes	
Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	<b>Mandate Effects</b>	
		Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No

H.R. 3481 would change how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) corresponds with people receiving education benefits and modify the pension program administered by VA. CBO estimates that enacting the bill would increase spending subject to appropriation by \$54 million and decrease direct spending by \$56 million over the 2025–2035 period (see Table 1). The budgetary effects of the legislation fall within budget functions 550 (health) and 700 (veterans benefits and services).

*Spending Subject to Appropriation.* Section 3 of H.R. 3481 would require VA to allow people receiving education benefits to correspond with the department via email, texting, or other forms of electronic messaging. Currently, that correspondence is carried out through the mail. VA is implementing a digital platform (the Digital GI Bill) through which it plans to modernize its processes regarding education benefits claims and payments. However, the department testified that the Digital GI Bill does not have the capability for electronic correspondence and would require additional funding to build the capability. Once built, VA would incur ongoing expenses for maintaining that capability; however, CBO expects that those costs would be offset by savings from a reduced number of mailings. On the basis of information related to the contract costs of the Digital GI Bill and personnel costs for contract management, CBO estimates that VA would require \$54 million to develop and implement information technology systems to electroni-

cally correspond with beneficiaries, over the 2025–2035 period. Such spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

*Direct Spending.* Under current law, VA reduces pension payments to veterans and survivors who reside in Medicaid nursing homes to \$90 per month. That required reduction expires November 30, 2031. Section 4 of H.R. 3481 would extend that reduction for 14 months, through January 31, 2033. CBO estimates that extending that requirement would reduce VA benefits by \$10 million per month. (Those benefits are paid from mandatory appropriations and are therefore considered direct spending.) As a result of that reduction in beneficiaries’ income, Medicaid would pay more of the cost of their care, increasing spending for that program by \$6 million per month. Thus, enacting section 4 would reduce net direct spending by \$56 million over the 2025–2035 period.

TABLE 1.—ESTIMATED BUDGETARY EFFECTS OF H.R. 3481

	By fiscal year, millions of dollars—												2025– 2030	2025– 2035
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035			
INCREASES IN SPENDING SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATION														
Estimated Authorization .....	0	50	1	1	2	*	*	*	*	*	*	54	54	
Estimated Outlays ....	0	13	31	7	3	*	*	*	*	*	*	54	54	
DECREASES (–) IN DIRECT SPENDING														
Estimated Budget Authority .....	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	–40	–16	0	0	0	–56	
Estimated Outlays ....	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	–40	–16	0	0	0	–56	

\* = between –\$500,000 and \$500,000.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Paul B.A. Holland. The estimate was reviewed by Christina Hawley Anthony, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

PHILLIP L. SWAGEL,  
*Director, Congressional Budget Office.*

#### FEDERAL MANDATES STATEMENT

The Committee adopts as its own the estimate of Federal mandates regarding H.R. 3481, as amended, prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

#### ADVISORY COMMITTEE STATEMENT

No advisory committees within the meaning of section 5(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act would be created by H.R. 3481, as amended.

#### STATEMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

Pursuant to Article I, section 8 of the United States Constitution, H.R. 3481, as amended, is authorized by Congress’ power to “provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States.”

#### APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that H.R. 3481, as amended, does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

#### STATEMENT ON DUPLICATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(5) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee finds that no provision of H.R. 3481, as amended, establishes or reauthorizes a program of the Federal Government known to be duplicative of another Federal program, a program that was included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111–139, or a program related to a program identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

#### DISCLOSURE OF DIRECTED RULEMAKING

Pursuant to section 3(i) of H. Res. 5, 115th Cong. (2017), the Committee estimates that H.R. 3481, as amended, contains no directed rulemaking that would require the Secretary to prescribe regulations.

#### SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS OF THE LEGISLATION

##### *Section 1: Short title*

This section would establish the short title of the bill as the “Delivering Digitally to Our Veterans Act of 2025.”

##### *Section 2: Improvement to certain outreach under Solid Start Program of Department of Veterans Affairs*

This section would amend 38 U.S.C § 6320(b) to allow VA’s Solid Start program to communicate via digital messaging if the veteran is unreachable via phone calls. Under this section, tailored lines of communication would include mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging.

##### *Section 3: Department of Veterans Affairs Use of tailored lines of communication for correspondence relating to educational assistance benefits*

This section would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3680 to create a new subsection that would allow veterans to opt-in to receive digital messaging for all education benefit communications within DGIB. This section would also allow an eligible veteran or eligible person to opt out of digital messaging. Tailored lines of communication under this section would include mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging.

##### *Section 4: Extension of certain limits on payments of pension*

This section would extend the limitation of pension payable to certain veterans, their surviving spouses, and their children as established in 38 U.S.C § 5503(d)(7) from November 30, 2031, to January 31, 2033.



## CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italic, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

## CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italics, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

**TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE**

\* \* \* \* \*

**PART III—READJUSTMENT AND RELATED BENEFITS**

\* \* \* \* \*

**CHAPTER 36—ADMINISTRATION OF EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS**

\* \* \* \* \*

**SUBCHAPTER III—MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS****§ 3680. Payment of educational assistance or subsistence allowances**

(a) PERIOD FOR WHICH PAYMENT MAY BE MADE.—(1) Except as provided in paragraphs (2) and (3), payment of educational assistance or subsistence allowances to eligible veterans or eligible persons pursuing a program of education or training, other than a program by correspondence, in an educational institution under chapter 31, 34, or 35 of this title shall be paid as provided in this section and, as applicable, in section 3108, 3482, 3491, or 3532 of this title. Such payments shall be paid only for the period of such veterans' or persons' enrollment in, and pursuit of, such program, but no amount shall be paid—

(A) to any eligible veteran or eligible person for any period when such veteran or person is not pursuing such veteran's or person's course in accordance with the regularly established policies and regulations of the educational institution, with the provisions of such regulations as may be prescribed by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (g) of this section, and with the requirements of this chapter or of chapter 34 or 35 of this title, but payment may be made for an actual period of pursuit of one or more unit subjects pursued for a period of time shorter than the enrollment period at the educational institution;

(B) to any eligible veteran or person for auditing a course;  
or

(C) to any eligible veteran or person for a course for which the grade assigned is not used in computing the requirements for graduation including a course from which the student withdraws unless—

(i) the eligible veteran or person withdraws because he or she is ordered to active duty; or

(ii) the Secretary finds there are mitigating circumstances, except that, in the first instance of withdrawal (without regard to withdrawals described in clause (i)) by the eligible veteran or person from a course or courses with respect to which the veteran or person has been paid assistance under this title, mitigating circumstances shall be considered to exist with respect to courses totaling not more than six semester hours or the equivalent thereof.

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the Secretary may, pursuant to such regulations as the Secretary shall prescribe, continue to pay allowances to eligible veterans and eligible persons enrolled in courses set forth in paragraph (1)(A)—

(A) during periods when educational institutions are temporarily closed under an established policy based on an Executive order of the President or due to an emergency situation, except that the total number of weeks for which allowances may continue to be so payable in any 12-month period may not exceed 4 weeks; or

(B) solely for the purpose of awarding a monthly housing stipend described in section 3313 of this title or a subsistence allowance described in section 3108, during periods following a permanent closure of an educational institution, or following the disapproval of a course of study described in section 3699(b)(1)(B) of this title, except that payment of such a stipend or allowance may only be continued until the earlier of—

(i) the date of the end of the term, quarter, or semester during which the closure or disapproval occurred; and

(ii) the date that is 120 days after the date of the closure or disapproval.

(3)(A) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), in the case of an eligible veteran or eligible person who is pursuing a program of education on less than a half-time basis during a period that is the last semester, term, or academic period the veteran or person will be enrolled in the program of education because the veteran or person will complete the program of education at the end of that semester, term, or academic period, the Secretary may, pursuant to such regulations as the Secretary shall prescribe, provide to the veteran or person educational assistance under chapter 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, or 35 of this title or under chapter 1606 of title 10 on the basis of the total number of credits or courses in which the veteran or person is enrolled, if—

(i) the number of credits the veteran or person needs to complete the program of education is less than the number of credits that would constitute enrollment on a more than half-time basis for that last semester, term, or academic period; and

(ii) the veteran or person—

(I) is enrolled in, or has completed, every course offered by the program of education during the last semester, term, or academic period in which the veteran or person is enrolled in the program of education; and

(II) enrolls in an additional course that is not required for the completion of such program of education and the enrollment in the non-required course in addition to the required course or courses in which the veteran or person is enrolled constitutes enrollment on more than a half-time basis.

(B) For purposes of providing a monthly housing stipend described in section 3313(c) to an eligible veteran or eligible person for whom the Secretary is providing educational assistance under chapter 33 of this title during a period that is the last semester, term, or academic period pursuant to subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall treat the veteran or person as pursuing a program of education on a full-time basis.

(b) CORRESPONDENCE TRAINING CERTIFICATIONS.—No educational assistance allowance shall be paid to an eligible veteran or spouse or surviving spouse enrolled in and pursuing a program of education exclusively by correspondence until the Secretary shall have received—

(1) from the eligible veteran or spouse or surviving spouse a certificate as to the number of lessons actually completed by the veteran or spouse or surviving spouse and serviced by the educational institution; and

(2) from the training establishment a certification or an endorsement on the veteran's or spouse's or surviving spouse's certificate, as to the number of lessons completed by the veteran or spouse or surviving spouse and serviced by the institution.

(c) APPRENTICESHIP AND OTHER ON-JOB TRAINING.—No training assistance allowance shall be paid to an eligible veteran or eligible person enrolled in and pursuing a program of apprenticeship or other on-job training until the Secretary receives from the training establishment a certification that such veteran or person was enrolled in and pursuing a program of apprenticeship or other on-job training during such period.

(d) ADVANCE PAYMENT OF INITIAL EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE OR SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE.—(1) The educational assistance or subsistence allowance advance payment provided for in this subsection is based upon a finding by the Congress that eligible veterans and eligible persons may need additional funds at the beginning of a school term to meet the expenses of books, travel, deposits, and payment for living quarters, the initial installment of tuition, and the other special expenses which are concentrated at the beginning of a school term.

(2) Subject to the provisions of this subsection, and under regulations which the Secretary shall prescribe, an eligible veteran or eligible person shall be paid an educational assistance allowance or subsistence allowance, as appropriate, advance payment. Such advance payment shall be made in an amount equivalent to the allowance for the month or fraction thereof in which pursuit of the program will commence, plus the allowance for the succeeding month. In the case of a person on active duty, who is pursuing a

program of education, the advance payment shall be in a lump sum based upon the amount payable for the entire quarter, semester, or term, as applicable. In no event shall an advance payment be made under this subsection to a veteran or person intending to pursue a program of education on less than a half-time basis. An advance payment may not be made under this subsection to any veteran or person unless the veteran or person requests such payment and the Secretary finds that the educational institution at which such veteran or person is accepted or enrolled has agreed to, and can satisfactorily, carry out the provisions of paragraphs (4)(B) and (C) and (5) of this subsection. The application for advance payment, to be made on a form prescribed by the Secretary, shall—

(A) in the case of an initial enrollment of a veteran or person in an educational institution, contain information showing that the veteran or person (i) is eligible for educational benefits, (ii) has been accepted by the institution, and (iii) has notified the institution of such veteran's or person's intention to attend that institution; and

(B) in the case of a re-enrollment of a veteran or person, contain information showing that the veteran or person (i) is eligible to continue such veteran's or person's program of education or training and (ii) intends to re-enroll in the same institution, and, in either case, shall also state the number of semester or clock-hours to be pursued by such veteran or person.

(3) For purposes of the Secretary's determination whether any veteran or person is eligible for an advance payment under this section, the information submitted by the institution, the veteran or person, shall establish such veteran's or person's eligibility unless there is evidence in such veteran's or person's file in the processing office establishing that the veteran or person is not eligible for such advance payment.

(4) The advance payment authorized by paragraph (2) of this subsection shall, in the case of an eligible veteran or eligible person, be (A) drawn in favor of the veteran or person; (B) mailed to the educational institution listed on the application form for temporary care and delivery to the veteran or person by such institution; and (C) delivered to the veteran or person upon such veteran's or person's registration at such institution, but in no event shall such delivery be made earlier than thirty days before the program of education is to commence.

(5) Upon delivery of the advance payment pursuant to paragraph (4) of this subsection, the institution shall submit to the Secretary a certification of such delivery. If such delivery is not effected within thirty days after commencement of the program of education in question, such institution shall return such payment to the Secretary forthwith.

(e) RECOVERY OF ERRONEOUS PAYMENTS.—(1) Subject to paragraph (2), if an eligible veteran or eligible person fails to enroll in or pursue a course for which an educational assistance or subsistence allowance advance payment is made, the amount of such payment and any amount of subsequent payments which, in whole or in part, are due to erroneous information required to be furnished under subsection (d)(2) of this section, shall become an overpayment and shall constitute a liability of such veteran or person to the United States and may be recovered, unless waived pursuant

to section 5302 of this title, from any benefit otherwise due such veteran or person under any law administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs or may be recovered in the same manner as any other debt due the United States.

(2) Paragraph (1) shall not apply to the recovery of an overpayment of an educational allowance or subsistence allowance advance payment to an eligible veteran or eligible person who fails to enroll in or pursue a course of education for which the payment is made if such failure is due to the death of the veteran or person.

(f) PAYMENTS FOR LESS THAN HALF-TIME TRAINING.—Payment of educational assistance allowance in the case of any eligible veteran or eligible person pursuing a program of education on less than a half-time basis shall be made in an amount computed for the entire quarter, semester, or term not later than the last day of the month immediately following the month in which certification is received from the educational institution that such veteran or person has enrolled in and is pursuing a program at such institution. Such lump sum payment shall be computed at the rate provided in section 3482(b) or 3532(a)(2) of this title, as applicable.

(g) DETERMINATION OF ENROLLMENT, PURSUIT, AND ATTENDANCE.—(1) The Secretary may, pursuant to regulations which the Secretary shall prescribe, determine and define with respect to an eligible veteran and eligible person the following:

(A) Enrollment in a course or program of education or training.

(B) Pursuit of a course or program of education or training.

(C) Attendance at a course or program of education or training.

(2) The Secretary may withhold payment of benefits to an eligible veteran or eligible person until the Secretary receives such proof as the Secretary may require of enrollment in and satisfactory pursuit of a program of education by the eligible veteran or eligible person. The Secretary shall adjust the payment withheld, when necessary, on the basis of the proof the Secretary receives.

(3) In the case of an individual other than an individual described in paragraph (4), the Secretary may accept the individual's monthly certification of enrollment in and satisfactory pursuit of a program of education as sufficient proof of the certified matters.

(4) In the case of an individual who has received an accelerated payment of basic educational assistance under section 3014A of this title during an enrollment period for a program of education, the Secretary may accept the individual's certification of enrollment in and satisfactory pursuit of the program of education as sufficient proof of the certified matters if the certification is submitted after the enrollment period has ended.

(h) PAYMENTS DURING EMERGENCY SITUATIONS.—(1) The Secretary may pay allowances to an eligible veteran or eligible person under subsection (a)(2)(A), if the veteran or person is enrolled in a program or course of education that—

(A) is provided by an educational institution or training establishment that is closed by reason of an emergency situation; or

(B) is suspended by reason of an emergency situation.

(2) The total number of weeks for which allowances may be paid by reason of this subsection may not exceed four weeks.

(3) Any amount paid under this subsection shall not be counted for purposes of the limitation on allowances under subsection (a)(2)(A).

*(i)(1) The Secretary shall provide a mechanism by which an eligible veteran or eligible person may use tailored lines of communication to send and receive correspondence with the Department of Veterans related to entitlement to and use of educational assistance benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary. The Secretary shall ensure that an eligible veteran or eligible person is provided with an opportunity to opt into sending and receiving such correspondence using such lines of communication rather than by mail.*

*(2) The Secretary shall provide to eligible veterans and eligible persons who are enrolled in a course or program of education or training notice of the opportunity to opt in to sending and receiving correspondence using tailored lines of communication pursuant to paragraph (1).*

*(3) In this subsection, the term "tailored lines of communication" includes mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging.*

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## **PART IV—GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS**

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### **CHAPTER 55—MINORS, INCOMPETENTS, AND OTHER WARDS**

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#### **§ 5503. Hospitalized veterans and estates of incompetent institutionalized veterans**

(a)(1)(A) Where any veteran having neither spouse nor child is being furnished domiciliary care by the Department, no pension in excess of \$90 per month shall be paid to or for the veteran for any period after the end of the third full calendar month following the month of admission for such care.

(B) Except as provided in subparagraph (D) of this paragraph, where any veteran having neither spouse nor child is being furnished nursing home care by the Department, no pension in excess of \$90 per month shall be paid to or for the veteran for any period after the end of the third full calendar month following the month of admission for such care. Any amount in excess of \$90 per month to which the veteran would be entitled but for the application of the preceding sentence shall be deposited in a revolving fund at the Department medical facility which furnished the veteran nursing care, and such amount shall be available for obligation without fiscal year limitation to help defray operating expenses of that facility.

(C) No pension in excess of \$90 per month shall be paid to or for a veteran having neither spouse nor child for any period after the month in which such veteran is readmitted for care described in subparagraph (A) or (B) of this paragraph and furnished by the De-

partment if such veteran is readmitted within six months of a period of care in connection with which pension was reduced pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (B) of this paragraph.

(D) In the case of a veteran being furnished nursing home care by the Department and with respect to whom subparagraph (B) of this paragraph requires a reduction in pension, such reduction shall not be made for a period of up to three additional calendar months after the last day of the third month referred to in such subparagraph if the Secretary determines that the primary purpose for the furnishing of such care during such additional period is for the Department to provide such veteran with a prescribed program of rehabilitation services, under chapter 17 of this title, designed to restore such veteran's ability to function within such veteran's family and community. If the Secretary determines that it is necessary, after such period, for the veteran to continue such program of rehabilitation services in order to achieve the purposes of such program and that the primary purpose of furnishing nursing home care to the veteran continues to be the provision of such program to the veteran, the reduction in pension required by subparagraph (B) of this paragraph shall not be made for the number of calendar months that the Secretary determines is necessary for the veteran to achieve the purposes of such program.

(2) The provisions of paragraph (1) shall also apply to a veteran being furnished such care who has a spouse but whose pension is payable under section 1521(b) of this title. In such a case, the Secretary may apportion and pay to the spouse, upon an affirmative showing of hardship, all or any part of the amounts in excess of the amount payable to the veteran while being furnished such care which would be payable to the veteran if pension were payable under section 1521(c) of this title.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section or any other provision of law, no reduction shall be made in the pension of any veteran for any part of the period during which the veteran is furnished hospital treatment, or institutional or domiciliary care, for Hansen's disease, by the United States or any political subdivision thereof.

(c) Where any veteran in receipt of an aid and attendance allowance described in subsection (r) or (t) of section 1114 of this title is hospitalized at Government expense, such allowance shall be discontinued from the first day of the second calendar month which begins after the date of the veteran's admission for such hospitalization for so long as such hospitalization continues. Any discontinuance required by administrative regulation, during hospitalization of a veteran by the Department, of increased pension based on need of regular aid and attendance or additional compensation based on need of regular aid and attendance as described in subsection (l) or (m) of section 1114 of this title, shall not be effective earlier than the first day of the second calendar month which begins after the date of the veteran's admission for hospitalization. In case a veteran affected by this subsection leaves a hospital against medical advice and is thereafter admitted to hospitalization within six months from the date of such departure, such allowance, increased pension, or additional compensation, as the case may be, shall be discontinued from the date of such readmission for so long as such hospitalization continues.

(d)(1) For the purposes of this subsection—

(A) the term “Medicaid plan” means a State plan for medical assistance referred to in section 1902(a) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396a(a)); and

(B) the term “nursing facility” means a nursing facility described in section 1919 of such Act (42 U.S.C. 1396r), other than a facility that is a State home with respect to which the Secretary makes per diem payments for nursing home care pursuant to section 1741(a) of this title.

(2) If a veteran having neither spouse nor child is covered by a Medicaid plan for services furnished such veteran by a nursing facility, no pension in excess of \$90 per month shall be paid to or for the veteran for any period after the month of admission to such nursing facility.

(3) Notwithstanding any provision of title XIX of the Social Security Act, the amount of the payment paid a nursing facility pursuant to a Medicaid plan for services furnished a veteran may not be reduced by any amount of pension permitted to be paid such veteran under paragraph (2) of this subsection.

(4) A veteran is not liable to the United States for any payment of pension in excess of the amount permitted under this subsection that is paid to or for the veteran by reason of the inability or failure of the Secretary to reduce the veteran’s pension under this subsection unless such inability or failure is the result of a willful concealment by the veteran of information necessary to make a reduction in pension under this subsection.

(5)(A) The provisions of this subsection shall apply with respect to a surviving spouse having no child in the same manner as they apply to a veteran having neither spouse nor child.

(B) The provisions of this subsection shall apply with respect to a child entitled to pension under section 1542 of this title in the same manner as they apply to a veteran having neither spouse nor child.

(6) The costs of administering this subsection shall be paid for from amounts available to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the payment of compensation and pension.

(7) This subsection expires on [November 30, 2031] *January 31, 2033*.

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## CHAPTER 63—OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

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### SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

#### § 6320. Solid Start program

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry out a program, to be known as the “Solid Start program”, under which the Secretary shall—

(1) build the capacity of the Department to efficiently and effectively respond to the queries and needs of veterans who have recently separated from the Armed Forces; and



(2) systemically integrate and coordinate efforts to assist veterans, including efforts—

(A) to proactively reach out to newly separated veterans to inform them of their eligibility for programs of and benefits provided by the Department, including how to enroll in the system of annual patient enrollment established and operated under section 1705 of this title and the ability to seek care and services under sections 1703 and 1710 of this title; and

(B) to connect veterans in crisis to resources that address their immediate needs.

(b) ACTIVITIES OF THE SOLID START PROGRAM.—(1) The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, shall carry out the Solid Start program of the Department by—

(A) collecting up-to-date contact information during transition classes or separation counseling for all members of the Armed Forces who are separating from the Armed Forces, while explaining the existence and purpose of the Solid Start program;

(B) **calling** *communicating with* each veteran, regardless of separation type or characterization of service, three times within the first year after separation of the veteran from the Armed Forces *through the use of tailored lines of communication, including mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging*;

(C) providing information about the Solid Start program on the website of the Department and in materials of the Department, especially transition booklets and other resources;

(D) ensuring calls are truly tailored to the needs of each veteran's unique situation by conducting quality assurance tests;

(E) prioritizing outreach to veterans who have accessed mental health resources prior to separation from the Armed Forces;

(F) providing women veterans with information that is tailored to their specific health care and benefit needs;

(G) as feasible, providing information on access to State and local resources, including Vet Centers and veterans service organizations; and

(H) gathering and analyzing data assessing the effectiveness of the Solid Start program.

(2) The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, may carry out the Solid Start program by—

(A) encouraging members of the Armed Forces who are transitioning to civilian life to authorize alternate points of contact who can be reached should the member be unavailable during the first year following the separation of the member from the Armed Forces; and

(B) following up missed phone calls with **tailored mailings** *tailored lines of communication, including mailings, text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic forms of messaging*, to ensure the veteran still receives similar information.

(3) In this subsection:

(A) The term “Vet Center” has the meaning given that term in section 1712A(h) of this title.

(B) The term “veterans service organization” means an organization recognized by the Secretary for the representation of veterans under section 5902 of this title.

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