

Modernize Monthly Housing Allowance for Veteran Students

The Monthly Allowance for Housing (MHA) for Veteran Students whose programs switched to distance learning due to COVID-19 will revert to half of the national Basic Housing Allowance average, even though it is likely that distance learning will be extended and expanded into 2021 and beyond.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill was passed in 2008 to provide education benefits to those who have served on active duty for at least 90 days since Sept. 10, 2001. These benefits include payment of tuition and fees, a stipend for textbooks and supplies, and a monthly housing allowance for up to 36 months.

The veteran student's MHA depends on the percentage level of benefits they are eligible for, how many courses they're enrolled in, and the zip code of the institution where the student physically attends the majority of classes. Normally, those pursuing a degree entirely online only receive about half as much of the MHA as student veterans who take traditional in-person courses.

Since 2008, increasing amounts of institutions have made available distance learning modalities for larger amounts of programs, credentials and certificates, and the percentage of military and veteran students enrolled in distance learning programs has steadily increased. These students have relied on effectively half of their eligible housing benefit to enroll in these distance learning programs. The coronavirus pandemic of 2020, however, sparked a predicament when institutions at all levels were forced to alter their educational programs to acclimate to the need for isolation and social distancing. Mass gatherings, including in-person college lectures have been cancelled and many converted to distance learning.

Changing to an online-only class structure would have left veteran students who were originally enrolled in in-person classes unable to qualify under VA regulation to receive their full housing benefits. Online-only student veterans, however, have not been afforded equivalent MHA entitlements as those of their peers.

The conditions set by COVID-19 have highlighted this inequity among student veterans in online programs, and it has made evident that online-only student veterans need and ought to be entitled to the full Monthly Housing Allowance afforded to all other student veterans throughout and following the COVID-19 crisis. To this end, the Veterans Education Project recommends that online-only veteran students receive an MHA entitlement equivalent to the zip-code of their residence.