

June 13, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
United States Senate
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
United States Senate
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cassidy and Ranking Member Sanders,

On behalf of the Veterans Education Project (VEP) and the veteran and military-affiliated students we serve, I write to express concern regarding potential postsecondary regulatory changes under the forthcoming *One Big Beautiful Act*. In particular, if the Congress pursues the HELP Committee's proposed language that includes a type of Gainful Employment for all with accompanying debt-to-earning standards, that the current proposed timelines and benchmarks unduly impact Master's and professional degree programs that are critical for providing veterans specialty care and services.

In particular, we are concerned that the Committee's proposed language to regulate Master's and professional degree programs does not take into account additional licensing and approval processes post-graduation that depress graduates' earnings up to six years post-graduation, namely, that the calculation of median earnings of such graduates from these Master's and professional degree programs essentially begins immediately upon such students' enrollment in the program and does not give sufficient time for these graduates' earnings to develop within the additional regulatory frameworks surrounding their profession:

"In the case of a graduate or professional program that requires less than 3 academic years (on a full-time basis) for completion, for which the median earnings of the programmatic cohort of students who received funds under this title for enrollment in such program, who entered into such program during the academic year that is 6 years before the year of the determination, who are no longer enrolled in any institution of higher education, and who are working, are, **for not less than of the 3 years immediately preceding the date of the determination**, less than the median earnings of a working adult who...has only a Bachelor's degree."

Without adjustments to this language, we foresee significant negative impacts on institutions of higher education (IHEs) that provide such programs and on professional degree seekers who make up the backbone of many veteran support services across the country; that, if implemented, there will be a suppression of graduates within these fields and the closure of significantly many high-value professional degree programs. The downstream effect would be a growing scarcity of qualified professionals to staff critical veteran-facing services in behavioral and physical healthcare and other essential professional services. This is even more concerning, given that research¹ indicates that approximately 26% of veterans are likely to experience a mental health or substance use disorder, yet less than one-third of those individuals currently have access available support.

We respectfully urge the Committee to reconsider the proposed earning test language on such Master's and professional programs in order to take into account further market and state regulatory environments in order to ensure high quality, affordable programs while also maintaining necessary accessibility to such programs.

¹[https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.202100112#:~:text=Among%20all%20veterans%2C%20433%20\(weighted,care%20utilization%20in%20this%20subsample.](https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.202100112#:~:text=Among%20all%20veterans%2C%20433%20(weighted,care%20utilization%20in%20this%20subsample.)

The Veterans Education Project is thankful for your attention to this matter and for your continuous efforts to improve and safeguard American postsecondary education and veteran students.

Sincerely,

Donald Franklin
Executive Director
Veterans Education Project