

The Veterans Education Project

Statement For the Record

**United States House
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**

On

Proposed Legislation

June 11, 2025

Veterans Education Project
<https://veteranseducationproject.org/>

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) is a nonprofit Veteran Service Organization that aims to highlight innovation within higher education and to support veteran and military students. The Veterans Education Project is committed to nonpartisan research, engagement, and policy implementation in our efforts to support institutions that meet the needs of student veterans, and guarantee the benefits and support systems necessary for veteran and military students to succeed.

Headquartered in Washington D.C., VEP partners with institutions of higher education to form pilot programs for accelerated degree pathways for members of Special Operations Forces; collaborates with research institutions on policy analysis and postsecondary veteran student outcomes; and advocates for needed legislation for the veteran community, postsecondary accountability, and innovative postsecondary programming that accelerates the socioeconomic advancement of veteran and military students and their families.

The Veterans Education Project was founded by Daniel Elkins, a veteran of the 19th Special Forces Group, and continues to advocate for veteran and military students under the leadership of its new Executive Director, Donald Franklin.

President – Daniel Elkins
Executive Director – Donald Franklin

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
119TH CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION**

MARCH 10, 2025

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide a statement for the record to be considered during this hearing, which includes many notable bills addressing topics in higher education and veterans' education benefits. The Veterans Education Project's mission is to advocate for veterans, service members, and their families to receive fair and equitable access to education benefits and high-quality postsecondary programs that uplift their socioeconomic standing and provide pathways to rewarding, purpose-driven lives.

In this statement, we address the following legislative proposals: the *Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act*; the *Veteran Education Assistance Adjustment Act*; the *Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act*; the *Limiting Extension of Vocational Rehabilitation Programs by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Discussion Draft*; the *Gold Star Family Education Parity Act*; the *Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship Opportunity Act*; the *Veterans' Transition to Trucking Act of 2025*; the *Enhancing the Transitioning Servicemember's Experience Act*; the *Gold Star and Surviving Spouse Career Services Act*; the *Streamlining the Solid Start Communications Act*; and the *Patriots Over Politics Act*.

We applaud the Committee's commitment to the educational needs of our Nation's veterans and servicemembers, and look forward to working on the advancement of these important issues to best serve those who have served us.

H.R. 3752, the Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the monthly housing stipend under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program for individuals who pursue programs of education solely through distance learning on more than a half-time basis.

This legislation removes the outdated policy that limits monthly housing allowance (MHA) benefits to 50% of the national average for veterans enrolled solely in distance learning programs on more than a half-time basis. By striking this limitation, H.R. 3752 restores full parity to veterans studying online, ensuring they receive the full housing allowance consistent with their earned benefit.

Online education is no longer a marginal or exceptional format. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the flexibility and necessity of remote learning, especially for non-traditional students such as veterans, who often balance education with work, family responsibilities, and transitional challenges. A 2023 Urban Institute brief¹ highlighted how inequitable housing benefit reductions have forced many veterans to make financial sacrifices simply because they chose a mode of learning better suited to their needs.

¹ <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Housing%20Allowances%20and%20the%20GI%20Bill.pdf>

Moreover, our own research has found that this two-tiered MHA system discourages veterans from enrolling in cost-effective, flexible online programs. Veterans should not be penalized for choosing the education path that best aligns with their circumstances, particularly when those paths improve completion rates, employment outcomes, and quality of life.

H.R. 3752 represents a practical, commonsense fix that aligns with how today's veterans learn and live, while reaffirming our national promise to honor their service with benefits that reflect the realities of modern education. The Veterans Education Project (VEP) strongly supports this legislation and commends Representative Ciscomani for his leadership. We urge the Committee to advance this bill swiftly and help deliver parity for all student veterans, regardless of their chosen learning format.

H.R. 1965, the Veteran Education Assistance Adjustment Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for an annual increase in stipend for books, supplies, equipment, and other educational costs under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Veteran Education Assistance Adjustment Act addresses a long-overdue shortcoming in the Post-9/11 GI Bill by increasing the annual stipend for educational supplies from \$1,000 to \$1,400. Just as importantly, it ensures the benefit keeps pace with inflation by implementing an annual cost-of-living adjustment tied to the Consumer Price Index.

Veterans pursuing higher education and vocational training increasingly face rising costs for books, equipment, and other essential materials. Yet, the stipend has remained frozen for over a decade. This bill responds to the reality that the cost of being a student in America has grown significantly and that veterans should not be left covering those increases out of pocket.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports H.R. 1965 as a timely and necessary update to one of the most utilized elements of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. We applaud Representatives Vasquez and Valadao for their bipartisan leadership in introducing legislation that makes veteran benefits more relevant, predictable, and responsive to current economic conditions.

H.R. 3579, the Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements to the Veterans Readiness and Employment program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act introduces a series of reforms to enhance transparency, standardize access, and improve oversight of the VA's VR&E program. The legislation would require veterans to submit a formal application before receiving an evaluation, cap employment assistance to 365 days, mandate outcome reporting and publication of wait times, and commission an independent review of program effectiveness.

These reforms aim to ensure that the VR&E program is achieving measurable results and delivering timely services to veterans. By requiring annual reports on pre- and post-program wages and wait times for counseling services, this legislation provides Congress and the public with data necessary to assess whether veteran outcomes are improving. Transparency of this kind is a vital accountability tool and an essential first step toward driving better performance and equity across the system.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports the intent of this bill and offers several recommendations to maximize its impact. First, while standardizing the intake process through a formal application is a reasonable step, the VA must also increase outreach and education efforts to ensure that veterans understand how to complete these applications. Many veterans are unfamiliar with complex VA procedures, and the process itself should not become a barrier to accessing earned benefits.

Second, the proposed 365-day cap on employment assistance should borrow some of the flexibility of the previously proposed limits on vocational rehabilitation programs. VEP recommends that extensions beyond this cap be allowed in cases involving extraordinary circumstances, provided that they are subject to review and reporting to the relevant Congressional committees.

Lastly, VEP supports the independent review of the program and encourages the explicit inclusion of Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) in that process. As frontline advocates and trusted partners, VSOs can provide essential insights into the lived experiences and unmet needs of veterans navigating VR&E services.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports H.R. 3579 as a constructive step toward improving VR&E program accountability, transparency, and modernization. We commend Representative Ciscomani and his colleagues for advancing this effort and look forward to supporting its implementation and refinement.

H.R. - , [Discussion Draft] Limiting Extension of Vocational Rehabilitation Programs by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

To amend title 38, United States Code, to limit the amount of time the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may extend the period of a vocational rehabilitation program for a veteran.

This draft legislation amends Section 3105(c) of Title 38 to prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from extending a veteran's vocational rehabilitation program beyond 96 months unless two specific conditions are met. The Secretary must determine that extraordinary circumstances apply to the veteran's case and must submit a written notice to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs in both chambers of Congress explaining the extension and justification.

Currently, the VA has broad discretion to extend program durations under Chapter 31. This can result in inconsistencies and limited oversight. While some extensions are warranted, particularly in cases involving medical complications or serious employment handicaps, the absence of standardized limitations increases the risk of inefficient program administration, delays in rehabilitation outcomes, and reduced accountability in the use of taxpayer funds.

By codifying a firm 96-month limit and requiring Congressional reporting for any exception, this legislation introduces necessary transparency, safeguards against misuse, and reinforces the expectation that vocational rehabilitation be focused, efficient, and outcome driven.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports this legislation as a responsible measure to preserve the integrity of the VR&E program, ensure appropriate use of resources, and improve results for veterans with service-connected disabilities. We appreciate the Committee's commitment to stronger oversight and veteran-centered reform.

H.R. 2720, the Gold Star Family Education Parity Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the termination of a certain educational assistance program, and for other purposes.

The Gold Star Family Education Parity Act brings long-overdue modernization to VA educational benefits by phasing out the outdated Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA, Chapter 35) program and transitioning eligible survivors and dependents to the more generous Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33). This shift ensures equitable access to higher education, job training, and related support services for Gold Star families, who have lost a loved one in service to the nation.

Under this legislation, the DEA program will sunset on August 1, 2029. Individuals losing eligibility under Chapter 35 due to this change will instead receive educational assistance through Chapter 33, with protections in place to ensure a smooth transition and parity in benefit value.

This legislation ensures that the families of our fallen heroes receive the full educational benefits their loved ones earned through their service and sacrifice. Providing survivors with access to the Post-9/11 GI Bill affirms our nation's commitment to honor not only those who served, but also the families they left behind.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports this bill's core aim to close the gap in benefit equity and modernize support for survivors. We thank Representative Kennedy for championing this important legislation and urge Congress to advance it without delay.

H.R. 2034, the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship Opportunity Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the requirements of the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship.

The Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship Opportunity Act expands access to a critical benefit that supports veterans pursuing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees. The bill lowers the credit hour threshold required for eligibility, removes the restrictive requirement that veterans must nearly exhaust their GI Bill benefits to qualify, and prioritizes awards for those furthest along in their education. These reforms are sensible and long overdue.

Reducing the credit hour requirement from 60 to 45 semester hours, and from 90 to 67.5 quarter hours, ensures more veterans can apply for the scholarship earlier in their academic careers. Eliminating the "near exhaustion" requirement removes a bureaucratic obstacle that has discouraged eligible students from applying. Finally, by prioritizing applicants who have used the most GI Bill months and are enrolled in qualifying STEM programs, the bill ensures benefits are targeted to those most likely to complete their degrees.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) strongly supports this legislation's effort to broaden access and reduce unnecessary red tape. Helping more veterans complete STEM degrees will not only benefit individual learners, but also support urgent national needs. Nowhere is this more apparent than in healthcare. As the Department of Veterans Affairs moves to expand enrollment and services for a growing veteran population, it will require a larger, highly trained healthcare workforce. Veterans pursuing STEM careers in nursing, medicine, and biomedical sciences are uniquely positioned to help

meet this demand, bringing both lived experience and critical skills to the VA system and affiliated providers.

We commend Representatives Budzinski and Hamadeh for their bipartisan leadership on this bill. Expanding this scholarship is not only a sound investment in veteran success, it is a strategic step toward strengthening the capacity of the VA to serve those who have served.

H.R. 2954, the Veterans' Transition to Trucking Act of 2025

To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to approve multi-State apprenticeship programs for purposes of veterans' educational assistance, and for other purposes.

Veterans face one of the most difficult employment transitions in the U.S. economy as they leave the military and enter the civilian workforce. This transition is often complicated by geographic moves, regulatory hurdles, and inconsistent credentialing requirements. In high-demand sectors like trucking, which is facing a national labor shortage, these barriers delay a veteran's ability to begin stable, well-paying careers.

The Veterans' Transition to Trucking Act helps address this challenge by allowing the Department of Veterans Affairs to approve multi-State apprenticeship programs for educational benefits. This commonsense change removes a significant bureaucratic roadblock and increases access to high-quality, industry-aligned training that spans state lines. For veterans looking to enter the trucking industry, a sector vital to national logistics and economic security, this bill opens up real pathways to success.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports this legislation for its practical approach to expanding vocational and apprenticeship opportunities. It aligns with VEP's mission to help veterans leverage their benefits for meaningful careers that support long-term stability. We commend Representatives Pappas and Kiggans for their leadership on this issue and urge swift passage of this bill.

H.R. 3387, the Enhancing the Transitioning Servicemember's Experience Act

To amend title 10 and title 38, United States Code, to improve the Transition Assistance Program for members of the Armed Forces, and for other purposes.

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) plays a vital role in preparing service members for the shift to civilian life. Yet in 2022, only 25 percent of active duty servicemembers began TAP on time. This shortfall leaves thousands unprepared at one of the most vulnerable points in their lives, a time often marked by major changes, loss of identity, and financial uncertainty. It is not a coincidence, furthermore, that the time period of one year post-service marks the highest rate of death by suicide among veterans. The TAP program is paramount not only in preparing servicemembers for economic opportunity, but also is one of the most powerful tools to prevent veteran death by suicide.

The Enhancing the Transitioning Servicemember's Experience Act responds directly to this crisis by strengthening accountability, extending access to TAP earlier in the separation process, improving oversight, and addressing key gaps for Guard and Reserve members, spouses, and families. It ensures that TAP is delivered in a more consistent, person-centered, and data-informed way.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports this legislation because the military to civilian transition is one of the most defining moments in a veteran's journey. A poorly executed transition can lead to

underemployment, benefit confusion, long-term instability, or even death by suicide. By reforming TAP, we invest in successful outcomes for veterans and their families.

We thank Representative Van Orden for his leadership and urge Congress to move swiftly on this important legislation. A more structured and accountable TAP system is not only practical, it is a moral obligation.

H.R. 3031, the Gold Star and Surviving Spouse Career Services Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the eligibility of surviving spouses of deceased members of the Armed Forces for services under the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program of the Department of Labor.

For the families of fallen service members, the road ahead is not only defined by grief but also by the challenge of rebuilding financial stability and career security. Yet, despite the depth of their sacrifice, surviving spouses are often left without access to the same employment and transition services available to veterans.

The Gold Star and Surviving Spouse Career Services Act takes an important step toward correcting this imbalance. By making surviving spouses eligible for career counseling, job readiness training, and individualized employment services through the Department of Labor's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, this legislation provides critical tools for long-term independence and opportunity.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports this bill because access to vocational and financial education is just as essential for surviving families as it is for returning veterans. Providing these services affirms our national commitment to the entire military family, not just those who come home, but also those who must carry on in their absence.

We thank Representative Bacon for his leadership and urge swift passage of this bill. Supporting surviving spouses with the resources they need to succeed is not only smart policy, it is a matter of honor.

H.R. 3386, the Streamlining the Solid Start Communications Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve certain outreach to veterans under the Solid Start program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The transition from military to civilian life can be overwhelming, especially when navigating a complex landscape of benefits and services. The Department of Veterans Affairs launched the Solid Start program in 2019 to directly address this challenge, reaching out to every newly separated service member during their first year post-discharge to provide information, guidance, and support.

The program is already delivering measurable results. According to a forthcoming Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, VA staff successfully connected with more than 70 percent of recently separated service members in fiscal year 2021, up from 57 percent in 2020, amounting to more than 137,000 completed calls. Veterans who were contacted were significantly more likely to enroll in VA health care, apply for disability benefits, and take advantage of education and job training resources. Notably, about 44 percent of those contacted enrolled in VA health care, compared to just 7 percent of veterans who were not reached.

H.R. 3386 builds on the success of Solid Start by allowing the VA to expand its communication channels to include text messaging, online chat, and other modern tools. These updates will make it easier to reach veterans where they are and ensure that no one misses out on critical services during a pivotal time in their lives.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports this legislation because a well-executed transition is foundational to veteran success. Education and career support are among the most important benefits available, but only if veterans know how to access them. Solid Start helps bridge that gap.

We thank Representative Van Orden for introducing this legislation and urge Congress to act swiftly. Improving how the VA communicates with newly separated veterans is not just a matter of efficiency, it is a matter of equity, and a smart investment in long-term outcomes.

H.R. 3619, the Patriots Over Politics Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to allow certain separated service members to transfer their earned educational assistance to dependents, and for other purposes.

H.R. 3619 provides a specific, time-limited remedy for veterans separated under a now-rescinded vaccine policy, allowing them to transfer their earned but previously rescinded Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to their dependents. The bill does not expand eligibility or institute a blanket pardon on those who separated voluntarily or involuntarily. It simply ensures that the families of individuals who met specific service requirements prior to separation are not prevented from utilizing a previously earned benefit.

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) supports this legislation as a matter of fairness and consistency. Access to earned educational benefits should not be arbitrarily limited due to a policy that is no longer in effect. Congress has previously acted to restore access to benefits for service members discharged under now-repealed policies, such as those separated under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." In each case, the goal has been the same: to ensure that rescinded policies do not unjustly limit access to earned benefits.

This bill offers a targeted correction that supports affected military families without altering the underlying structure of the GI Bill. We thank Representative Barrett for introducing this legislation and encourage Congress to advance this narrowly crafted and principled measure.

Ending Statement

The Veterans Education Project thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide statements on the legislation before you. We look forward to working with you to ensure that veterans pursuing higher education are best served by your efforts.

Donald Franklin
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Veterans Education Project