

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 21, 2017

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Mattis,

We write today to urge the Department of Defense (DoD) to take steps to protect service members attending Ashford University in light of the company's impending loss of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Post-9/11 GI Bill approval. Specifically, we ask that DoD warn currently enrolled Tuition Assistance (TA) beneficiaries and prohibit new TA enrollments at Ashford.

Ashford University has become a national online enterprise that is the poster child for unfair, deceptive, abusive practices – especially against veterans and service members – in the for-profit college industry. Ashford is currently facing investigations by attorneys general in New York, North Carolina, and California. In 2014, Ashford agreed to pay \$7.25 million in a settlement with the Iowa Attorney General for its misleading recruitment practices. Just last year, Ashford agreed to pay \$30 million in a settlement with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau for deceptive acts and practices including lying to students about their student loan payments.

On November 9, the VA notified Ashford that it is not in compliance with GI Bill eligibility requirements related to state approval and has 60 days to come into compliance or lose benefits. We are pleased with the VA's actions to enforce the law and its regulations. But the fact remains that Ashford's irresponsible actions threaten to interrupt the education of some 9,000 veterans using GI Bill education benefits to attend the institution. We have urged the VA to take additional steps to protect veterans.

Ashford's loss of GI Bill eligibility also puts at risk service members using DoD Tuition Assistance benefits – in 2016, Ashford was the third largest recipient of TA benefits, enrolling 15,447 service members. According to DoD Instruction 1322.25, institutions of higher education must be approved for VA GI Bill funding in order to participate in DoD's Voluntary Education Programs, including Tuition Assistance.

Given the impact the impending loss of its GI Bill approval is likely to have on Ashford's Tuition Assistance participation, we urge the Department of Defense to take immediate steps to adequately protect service members. We urge DoD to immediately notify, through direct email and mail, all TA students currently enrolled at Ashford of the impending disruption of benefits and provide these students with resources about their rights and high quality transfer options.

On November 15, Ashford announced a voluntary suspension of new GI Bill enrollees and we asked the VA to use its authority to enforce a prohibition until further notice. We urge DoD to prohibit new TA enrollments at Ashford. If it is too risky for new GI Bill beneficiaries to enroll at Ashford, it is too risky for TA beneficiaries. We cannot allow additional service members to be put at risk by signing up at Ashford – only to find their school cut off from benefits in a few short weeks.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



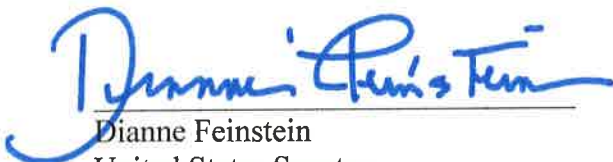
Jack Reed
United States Senator



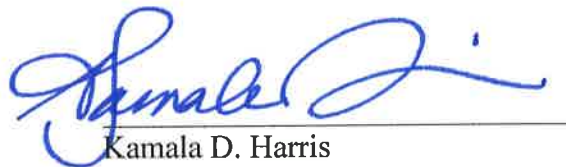
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Tom Carper
United States Senator



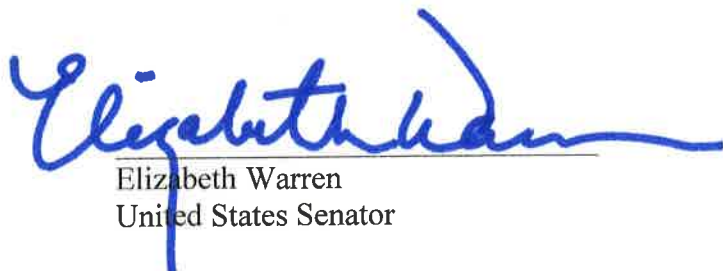
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable David Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs