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## Veterans groups slam amendment enabling easier access to military bases for-profit schools

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Several veterans' groups want Senate Armed Services Chairman [John McCain](#) and Sen. [Joe Manchin](#) to strip out an amendment from a defense policy bill that would enable for-profit colleges to gain easier access to military bases.

Pressure was expected to mount this week as Sen. [Sherrod Brown](#), a longtime critic of the for-profit industry, was rounding up Senate opposition to the measure and planned to introduce an amendment Thursday with Sen. [Dick Durbin](#) to block it.

The veterans groups say the insertion in the defense authorization bill would undermine protections rolled out by the Defense Department as part of a 2012 executive order by President Barack Obama that requires schools that participate in the military tuition assistance program to sign a memorandum of understanding agreeing to certain terms designed to protect military members. Among them is that a college must get permission from an installation's education adviser to enter.

The amendment says the Defense Department "shall" grant access to schools that sign the agreement for the purposes of advising enrolled students, but also military members eligible for tuition assistance dollars. It would also require access to be granted in proportion to the number of students enrolled by each school.

"Weakening the existing DoD regulations is the opposite of what service members need right now," the groups said in a [letter](#) this week to Manchin (D-W.Va), who sponsored the amendment passed in the Senate Armed Services Committee with McCain's blessing. American Public University System, which is popular among service members, is headquartered in Charles Town, W.Va. A similar [letter](#) was sent to McCain.

The veterans groups ask that at minimum, the senators rework the amendment to ensure it "does not undercut sensible DoD protections against fraudulent and unduly aggressive recruiting under the guise of protecting school access."

Manchin's office released a statement Wednesday saying that "nothing in this amendment prohibits installation commanders to use their discretion to bar institutions that they deem predatory or have been involved in predatory practices in the past. The spirit of this amendment was to enable service members' accessibility to academic counseling regardless of modality of education."

An aide to McCain said the Manchin amendment is about helping students receive counseling and support, and that he received the letter and would look into options to ensure "there are no unintended consequences."

It's because of terms in the memorandum of understanding agreements that the Defense Department last year was able to [temporarily suspend](#) the University of Phoenix from enrolling new students using military tuition assistance dollars. One of the college's alleged infractions was that it didn't get permission to enter military installations.

McCain, whose state is home to the headquarters of the University of Phoenix, aggressively opposed the Defense Department's actions against the University of Phoenix.

The groups signing onto the letters protesting the amendment include the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Veterans Education Success, the Association of the United States Navy and the Vietnam Veterans of America. The National Association of College Admissions Counseling also signed them.

Opposition to the amendment by Sen. [Martin Heinrich](#) (D-N.M.), was also noted in the committee conference report.

"I support the principle that schools should have access to their students for advisement purposes," Heinrich said, "but we must make sure we do not create security issues or unfair advantages for some schools over others, and that service members, especially junior members who use this benefit the most, are protected from recruiting practices that often do not have the service member's best interests at heart."