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COMMITTEE ON
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Congress of the United States
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The Honorable John B. King, Jr.
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans' Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary King and Secretary McDonald:

As Acting Ranking Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I write to you regarding the recommendation by the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) that the Department of Education (ED) withdraw recognition of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS). I strongly support this recommendation and encourage its adoption by ED, but urge ED and the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) to work together, and with ACICS-accredited schools, to ensure the well-being and future success of the student veterans and their dependents using GI Bill benefits at these schools.

As you know, pursuant to 34 CFR 668.13, ED has the option of granting up to 18 months of provisional standing under Title IV to ACICS-accredited schools to allow them to seek and obtain accreditation from a valid, ED-recognized accreditor. During this time, students using Title IV benefits – federal student loans, Pell Grants, etc. – may continue using such benefits at these schools. Conversely, under 38 U.S. Code § 3679, GI Bill users at these schools face a sudden cliff, almost immediately losing their monthly basic housing allowance (BAH), putting tens of thousands of veterans and their dependents at risk of homelessness. And these students will not be able to use their education benefits at their schools beginning the following semester, forcing them to quickly find another school if they want to seamlessly continue their education.

For these reasons, I believe that it is extremely important that any ED order withdrawing recognition of ACICS and issuing provisions for ACICS-accredited institutions includes a teach-out plan for GI Bill beneficiaries. We cannot forget the needs of the brave men and women who have risked their lives to defend our nation.

In addition, VA should immediately alert GI Bill beneficiaries at ACICS-accredited schools of the impending decision's impact on the use of their entitlement, and receipt of their BAH. I also believe that VA has the existing authority – and should exercise this authority – to prohibit ACICS-accredited schools from enrolling new student veterans using GI Bill benefits until those schools are able to find a valid new accreditor. It is simply bad policy to allow a newly-transitioning veteran to begin using his or her invaluable, but limited, GI Bill entitlement at a school which faces precarious accreditation status.

Furthermore, I ask VA and ED to work together, and in collaboration with non-profit education and veterans service organizations, to swiftly identify properly accredited, good quality, affordable schools – like community colleges – where veterans and dependents at ACICS-accredited schools may transfer some or all of their credits.

Finally, in Congress, I am working with my colleagues to pass legislation that would allow VA the same flexibility as ED to permit ACICS-accredited schools no more than 18 months to continue to receive GI Bill benefits from students already enrolled while they seek new accreditation. While my hope is that these student veterans will seek counseling to help with the transfer process long before they have used 18 months of their limited GI Bill entitlement at these schools, my first priority is to protect student veterans and their families from being cut off from housing and education benefits, with nowhere to turn.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and I look forward to your swift response. Please contact Julia Steinberger at Julia.Steinberger@mail.house.gov should you need any additional information regarding my request.

Sincerely,



MARK TAKANO
Acting Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee