

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

HEARING ON EXAMINING MID-SEMESTER SCHOOL CLOSURES
IMPACT ON STUDENT VETERANS

May 15, 2019

TESTIMONY OF LACHELLE GRIFFIN

Hi, my name is LaChelle Griffin. First of all, I would like to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you. I am here today with the hope that others student veterans will not have the same experience as I did when I went to college.

I first enlisted in the Army in June 1989. I served as Staff Sergeant and was honorably discharged in May of 2010. After being in the Army for 21 years, adjusting to civilian life was rough, on top of being a single parent, so I decided to take some time to decompress before enrolling in school. After some time, I knew I needed to get a degree to make a better life for myself and for my child, so in January of 2017, I enrolled in Virginia College.

When I first started school, I was working towards an Associate's degree in Health Care Reimbursement. Then, 9 months in, the school told me that they were no longer offering an Associate's degree in my field. Instead, they would only be offering a certificate. I did not want a certificate; I wanted an Associate's degree, so I decided to change my major to Surgical Tech so that I could still get the Associate's degree that I set out to get. Several months after that, in

the summer of 2018, I found out that the school would be closing in August of 2019. I was concerned at first, but felt relieved to know that I would be done with my classes and graduated by that time, so I stayed at Virginia College. I continued to attend classes and then, suddenly, I went to school in December of 2018 and I was told that the school would be closing the very next week. I was devastated and did not know what to do. I had completed all of my coursework and only had 90 days of clinicals left to complete before I could graduate. I called numerous schools to see if they would allow me to finish my clinicals and award me a degree, but none were willing. I also contacted employers about allowing me to finish my clinical portion. No one was interested without having a contract with the school. On top of that, I can't find any school that will accept my credits from Virginia College.

I was using my GI Bill benefits to attend Virginia College and had used up the majority of them during my time there. I applied to get them back once the school closed but I was only able to get them restored for the term that I was attending when the school closed - which means that the other year and a half of my GI Bill were wasted. I am now left with the only option being to go back to school and start all over, and I don't have enough months left on my GI Bill to complete an Associate's degree. Since I am a disabled veteran, I was approved for Vocational Rehabilitation, but I was only approved to get a certificate, not an Associate's degree like I would have had had Virginia College not closed. The only way that I can get an Associate's degree at this point is to take out student loans, and that is not a luxury that I can afford.

Had Virginia College not closed, I would have an Associate's degree right now and would be able to work as a Surgical Technician. Instead, I have no degree, no job, and not enough of my GI Bill left to pay for a degree. I wasted two years of my life that I can never get back. This entire process has been very stressful and I hope others don't have to experience the same thing. I would be in a better situation if I were able to get all of my GI Bill benefits restored so that I could get at least get a degree somewhere else. That is why I am asking Congress to protect student veterans when schools close, and to reinstate all GI Bill benefits.