

Field Hearing of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs

San Diego, CA

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Statement from Eric Dean on Ashford University

My name is Eric Dean. I am a former employee of Ashford University. Not just an employee, but an Enrollment Services Advisor, or recruiter from June 2015 through December 2017. I am also a US Navy Veteran. Once starting at Ashford, I quickly saw that I wasn't an advisor, but a salesperson. Ashford created a competitive sales environment for their front-line staff. My job was to enroll and retain. This was anywhere between three student applications up to 25 student applications in a month over my time at AU. If I didn't hit my numbers for a month, I feared that I would be written up the next month. I would make upwards of 250 calls a day and attempt to spend time getting to know perspective students. After building relationships with possible students, I would more often than not find out that these students were found from targeted ads and were often members of low-income communities of color. My job was to build a friendship in order to make the perspective student comfortable enough to fill out an application. Then I would watch those students become financially liable after the first three weeks of the first class, which was an incentive for these students to get their financial aid paperwork processed. I want to make something clear about how Ashford operates. I saw first-hand how their business is run and calling it a "non-profit" does a disservice to students when it is still owned by Bridgepoint Education, INC, now Zovio, which has shares on the New York stock exchange. Their entire goal is to financially line the pockets of their shareholders and that does not and cannot put education before profit. When education is used as a tool to boost the

profits of the owners, we have failed California students, which is why I fully support a crackdown.

Not only was I a military advisor, whose whole purpose at Ashford was to recruit military veterans and their GI Bill, but I too, am a veteran. I served Active Duty Navy from 2007 through 2012, and the navy reserves from 2012 through 2015. I knew where I was working wasn't ideal because I could never buy-in, but it paid my bills, which in itself, is motivation to do well at selling for-profit education. I started recruiting Military related personnel three months into the job because I am a veteran, and unfortunately have a personality for sales, but not the heart. I would often have conversations with veterans who had been struggling to get on their feet after their transition. This is something all too familiar to me. These veterans did not have direction, but my job was to enroll, and the pressure to enroll these students was very apparent. Again, it was about being these students' friends, then get them signed up for school, and then forget about them. If our numbers were slipping, our director would take the team into a conference room and publicly post our numbers on the projector. On top of that, the pressure we put on these students to get their VA documents completed was crucial to Ashford's retainment strategy. The money from the GI Bill is crucial to the survival of for-profit universities, The GI Bill money is key to the structure of places like Ashford. They need it to survive, which means they have to target veterans to keep their shareholders happy. Again, this is all about putting profit above education. It is a model that fails our veterans, fails our students, and fails our country.