



VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

COMMITTEE HEARING ON U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BUDGET REQUEST FOR

FISCAL YEAR 2021

SUBMITTED TO THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 27, 2020

Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Roe, and Members of the Committee:

Veterans Education Success is a non-profit organization with a mission to advance higher education success for veterans, service members, and military families, and to protect the integrity and promise of the GI Bill and other federal education programs.

In addition to research, providing free case work to students having trouble with the GI Bill or impacted by predatory schools, and elevating the voices of students to share with policy makers both their positive and negative experiences in higher education, we are focused on addressing ways to increase the continued academic success of military-connected students in their pursuit of their academic goals.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget request for Fiscal Year 2021. We are concerned to see only \$24 million allocated to upgrade the outdated VA IT system for the Office of Education Service in the budget proposal. Given the size of the system and how outdated it is, we understand that the amount needed to upgrade the IT system is closer to \$150 million.

The Office of Education Service has worked hard to make the current system work; however, a sinking boat can be patched only so many times before it finally sinks. In 2018, we saw military-connected students around the country negatively impacted by this outdated system during the implementation of certain provisions of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act. As Congress continues to increase the demands on VA, and technology continues to improve, without an overhauled IT system, it is only a matter of time before something like the 2018 disbursement delays happens again.

The antiquated system currently being used is not sustainable in the long term, leaves room for human error, and takes VA employees away from providing other necessary support for GI Bill beneficiaries. Recently, we were walked through the process a VA official must go through in order to certify a student's benefits. For a student with no extra challenges, they must click through a minimum of ten different systems for one certification. What should be a quick and automated system ends up taking at least 20 minutes to process.

The antiquated IT system has other implications. In our recent report, "[*Overemphasis on Payment Accuracy Impedes More Effective SAA Oversight of Schools Participating in the GI Bill*](#)," we found that the State Approving Agencies are spending too much of their time conducting payment audits (in which each school's financial records are checked, by hand, for social security number accuracy – something that could easily be accomplished by a modernized IT system). These time-consuming payment audits are crowding out the ability of State Approving Agencies to conduct quality oversight of GI Bill schools and to ensure schools are honoring GI Bill students' rights.

We ask Congress to please work with the Veterans Benefits Administration and The Office of Education Service to identify the appropriate amount of resources needed to update their IT system and then ensure the money is both allocated and appropriated accordingly.

Veterans Education Success sincerely appreciates the opportunity to express our views on VA's budget request before the Committee today. Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, Veterans Education Success has received no federal grants in Fiscal Year 2020, nor in the previous two years.