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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 6, 2008

Honorable Jim Webb
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Webb,

I offer you my personal congratulations on your latest revised version of S. 22, the proposed "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2007." I am very aware of your hard and personal efforts on this legislation and commend your commitment and energy to the cause of ensuring that GI Bill benefits meet the needs of our newest veterans. I share that commitment.

As you know, immediately after this latest version of your legislation was unveiled on February 28, your staff met with the staff of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. At that meeting, Committee staff raised a number of issues and concerns that I have with the most recent draft of S. 22. Because there has been some confusion about my efforts to date, through Committee staff, on your legislation, I am enclosing a list of the matters discussed during that meeting so as to ensure that you are personally aware of them.

Should you or your staff wish additional information on these or any other matters or wish to discuss any of them further, please don't hesitate to let me know. The Committee staff is always available to work with your staff on any matter.

Sincerely,



Daniel K. Akaka
Chairman

Enclosures

Issues and Concerns Regarding Star Print Version of S. 22

- **Localized differentials in benefits:** For the first time, this measure would introduce a concept of different levels of benefits based on very localized criteria. No other benefit payment administered by VA has ever done this. As a precedent, this needs to be carefully evaluated.
- **Stipend vs. Housing Allowance:** In lieu of the \$1,000 a month stipend proposed to be paid under the original S. 22 proposal, this version incorporates an allowance based on the Department of Defense's Housing Allowance. This would mean that individuals would receive additional living payments every month based on the zip code of the institution in which they are enrolled (not the zip code where they live). (Attached is spread sheet showing a state-by-state analysis of random levels of benefits.)
- **Recruitment and Retention:** While the revised proposal includes some authority for the military to use "kickers," it appears to not permit kickers to be used at time of enlistment but only at reenlistment. These reenlistment kickers have never been used by DOD; however, the enlistment kickers are relied on to help recruiting in a variety of ways.
- **Non-traditional and Less than Full-time Training:** Measure does not address a multitude of issues relating to non-traditional training (such as distance-learning) or training on less than full-time basis. For example, should an individual employed full time and enrolled on a quarter-time basis (i.e., one course a semester), receive one quarter of the living stipend? Is paying a living stipend to an individual taking a correspondence course good policy?
- **50 different caps on benefits, eight eligibility tiers, nearly 400 zip code living allowances and more:** The administrative burden that could result from the proposal is enormous and would make timely and accurate benefit payments nearly impossible.

State by State Housing Payment

Alabama	\$942	Montgomery	\$691	Perry
Alaska	\$1,659	Anchorage	\$1,783	Fairbanks
Arizona	\$1,254	Tuba City	\$796	St. Johns
Arkansas	\$849	De Queen	\$779	Warren
California	\$2,512	San Fransisco	\$1,069	Fresno
Colorado	\$1,285	Denver	\$796	Lamar
Connecticut	\$2,036	Greenwich	\$1,078	Canaan
Delaware	\$1,615	Wilmington	\$1,358	Ellendale
Florida	\$1,707	Miami	\$867	Perry
Georgia	\$1,198	Atlanta	\$978	Macon
Hawaii	\$2,114	Honolulu	\$1,778	Honokaa
Idaho	\$1,025	Sand Point	\$797	Boise
Illinois	\$1,612	Chicago	\$924	Rock Island
Indiana	\$1,057	Indianapolis	\$884	Muncie
Iowa	\$970	Iowa City	\$814	Spencer
Kansas	\$975	Kansas City	\$796	Hill City
Kentucky	\$901	Lexington	\$761	Pikeville
Louisiana	\$1,242	New Orleans	\$761	Winnfield
Maine	\$1,166	Bar Harbor	\$782	Houlton
Maryland	\$1,659	Annapolis	\$1,352	Thurmont
Massachusetts	\$1,827	Boston	\$1,219	Pittsfield
Michigan	\$1,287	Grosse Point	\$667	Alpena
Minnesota	\$1,393	Minneapolis/St. Paul	\$884	Marshall
Mississippi	\$1,043	Hazlehurst	\$975	Jackson
Missouri	\$1,076	St. Louis	\$814	Poplar Bluffs
Montana	\$929	Missoula	\$761	Miles City
Nebraska	\$1,029	Omaha	\$831	Ainsworth
Nevada	\$1,222	Las Vegas	\$1,113	Elko
New Hampshire	\$1,537	Manchester	\$796	Colebrook
New Jersey	\$2,017	Newark	\$1,725	Brick
New Mexico	\$1,210	Santa Fe	\$761	Silver City
New York	\$2,444	NYC	\$923	Massena
North Carolina	\$1,085	Charlette	\$948	Kinston
North Dakota	\$916	Bismarck	\$779	Martin
Ohio	\$1,165	Cincinnati	\$902	Defiance
Oklahoma	\$874	Oklahoma City	\$831	Beaver
Oregon	\$1,176	Portland	\$979	Medford
Pennsylvania	\$1,615	Philadelphia	\$867	Bradford
Rhode Island	\$1,672	Newport	\$1,443	Providence
South Carolina	\$1,164	Charleston	\$990	Edgefield
South Dakota	\$871	Sioux City	\$814	Martin
Texas	\$1,196	Dallas	\$849	Happy
Utah	\$1,254	Park City	\$884	Ferron
Vermont	\$1,149	White River Junction	\$1,113	Morrisville
Virginia	\$1,855	Fairfax	\$920	Franklin
Washington	\$1,339	Seattle	\$955	Walla Walla
West Virginia	\$1,153	Charles Town	\$779	Logan
Wisconsin	\$1,294	Milwaukee	\$849	Park Falls
Wyoming	\$1,254	Jackson	\$884	Wamsutter