



Jennifer Esparza, Veterans Education Success  
Testimony  
U.S. Education Department  
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Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer Esparza, and I am a Law Fellow with Veterans Education Success.

I wanted to speak to you today because I'm on the front lines of serving defrauded student veterans. It's my job to try to help them. But the sad truth is there isn't much help for them. Veterans tell me they feel like their country is letting them down.

Each week -- without fail -- we receive emails and phone calls from veterans who were cheated out of their benefits and lied to by college recruiters. Because of the high cost of predatory schools, many veterans are forced to take out loans, sometimes without their knowledge -- leaving them with crushing and unfair debt.

For instance, one veteran told us that American Intercontinental University had her sign paperwork without explaining she was signing up for student loans. The paperwork was presented to her as a hardship grant for being a single mother at the time. Another veteran told us about coercive and aggressive recruitment tactics used to get him to sign up for an MBA at a for-profit school, which included the promise of career counseling that never came true, and a claim that the Bachelor's degree that he obtained at that school would not be taken seriously unless he also obtained the MBA.

It's not difficult for me to believe their experiences because I've been there too. I spent 11 years in the Marine Corps. While still on active duty, I was lured by a recruiter to enroll at Ashford. The recruiter's tactics were so sleazy, asking me for personal information. I was so young and he used it against me. I'm lucky I had a brother who helped me leave Ashford and attend a good school. But most veterans aren't so lucky.

I've learned some lessons from the veterans who contact us: First, I can tell you that having a robust closed-school discharge regulation without a strong Borrower Defense rule, is not enough because predatory schools are successful in preying on students long before they shut down, and veterans don't often know that they have been victimized until they hear about lawsuits or other students speaking out.

Following that, the current standard for borrower defense relief is too high and leaves veterans feeling hopeless. They're asked to "prove" more than any student could possibly prove on their own, and they're so discouraged by the fact that the Department of Education continues to allow predatory schools to operate with federal funding.

You have the opportunity to fix this. I ask you to remember the veterans and service members whose financial futures are ruined by the loans encouraged by predatory schools. They need a strong Borrower Defense rule. Thank you for your time.