



**ORAL TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM HUBBARD,
VICE PRESIDENT FOR VETERANS & MILITARY POLICY
PRESENTED TO THE
U.S. HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
ON THE TOPIC OF
“LESS IS MORE: THE IMPACT OF BUREAUCRATIC
RED TAPE ON VETERANS EDUCATION BENEFITS”**

September 20, 2023

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and Members of the Subcommittee:

We thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before the Subcommittee today. Veterans Education Success is a nonprofit organization, with the mission of advancing higher education success for veterans, service members, and military families, and protecting the integrity and promise of the GI Bill and other federal education programs.

Drawing from our team's experience – and direct interactions with student veterans, their families, and stakeholders – we submit our observations for the Subcommittee's consideration.

We would like to express our general gratitude to the leadership and staff in Education Service at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Their collaboration on many of these issues, and commitment to serving veterans, are worth highlighting specifically. However, we also feel it is important to highlight areas where we believe there is room for improvement.

Since the very first GI Bill in 1944, there have been scammers looking to take advantage of veterans' benefits. In 1952, a House Select Committee, led by Congressman Olin Teague of Texas exposed the trend of predatory schools targeting veterans for their GI Bill benefits. And in 2012, the Senate HELP Committee issued an alarming report that found widespread deception by predatory schools.

Given the issues of the past decade, and prior – including numerous sudden collapses of risky schools – Congress passed several significant bipartisan laws. These laws aim to combat fraud by bad actor schools and programs, ultimately protecting veterans' benefits and taxpayer dollars. This includes the Isakson-Roe Act, the authorizing legislation for risk-based surveys.

Risk-based surveys are important both for protecting veterans and taxpayers, and for ensuring the efficient use of the limited resources VA and the State approving agencies have. However, our testimony, along with our colleagues at this table, highlights a fundamental point: VA's current approach does not match the clear direction of Congress.

As our colleagues at ACE point out, VA is currently selecting an overly broad set of schools for risk-based surveys in contrast with what the statute had contemplated. Specifically, Congress established five triggers for a risk-based survey, yet VA continues to launch risk-based surveys even in the absence of one of these five triggers.

As the University of Wisconsin rightly notes, 'increased enrollment' is not a mandatory trigger, but is instead listed in another section of the statute, which lays out the issues an SAA should consider during a review; – if, and only if – such a review has been triggered by one of the five mandatory issues.

We also strongly support NASAA's comments that VA should follow the pilot model, and implement the database, which would result in a dramatically smaller number of schools being selected for review.

In addition to risk-based surveys, persistent red tape and VA statutory misinterpretations continue to hinder the potential of veterans' education benefits. As outlined in our written testimony, this includes:

- First, school closures and GI Bill restoration policies – where VA continues failing to implement unambiguous statutory guidelines, even after this Committee clarified them in the VETS Credit Act;
- Second, a lack of necessary transparency on the GI Bill Comparison Tool. This harms veterans, who should rightfully expect transparent information in their school search process;
- And third, VA's refusal to exempt Marines under the "Excess Leave Program" from a newly revised interpretation, despite the legal obligation to do so.

We believe there is a pattern to these issues. Time and time again, this body passes thoughtful, well-positioned legislation – based on stakeholder input – with the intention of supporting veterans and their goals.

Then, VA executes a surprising interpretation that is unsupported by law, and inconsistent with Congressional intent. Couple that with some schools underresourcing the appropriate offices on campus, and the result is that the laws put in place to safeguard hard-earned benefits are not being properly executed.

We hope to continue our efforts in collaboration with VA and the committed people here in this room who simply want to do right by veterans, for they and their families should be VA's one and only focus.

We thank the Subcommittee for your time, attention, and devotion to veterans, and for inviting us here today to share our perspective. We look forward to answering any questions you may have.