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## LEGAL EXPERT AND STUDENT VETERANS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS

### *Defrauded Veterans Speak Out About Sham Colleges & Need to Strengthen Accreditation & Licensing to Protect Students*

**WASHINGTON, DC**—In the wake of being defrauded out of their GI Bill benefits, multiple veterans urged the federal government to better protect student veterans by creating a more rigorous authorization process for colleges and universities before they can take veterans' hard-earned GI Bill benefits as tuition payments.

"Veterans are understandably angry when they learn that a sham 'college' that cheated them out of their GI Bill was known to be a scam but was nevertheless approved for federal tuition," said **Carrie Wofford, President of Veterans Education Services**, a national nonprofit that fights for the GI Bill and the rights of veterans to utilize their education benefits. "The system is seriously broken. College accreditors and state authorization entities have [been exposed by news reporters](#) and law enforcement for approving sham 'colleges' with no teachers and no classrooms. We are pleased the Department is undertaking much-needed reform."

Telling their stories last week to the U.S. Department of Education during a public hearing on proposed rulemaking to revise college accreditation and state authorization, multiple veterans called for reforms to the process by which the U.S. Department of Education authorizes and oversees colleges and universities to receive federal student aid – authorization relied upon by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in approving GI Bill and veterans' education benefits. The veterans and their stories were brought to light by Veterans Education Services, continuing its long history of helping veterans tell their stories and advocating for changes to the system.

Leading the fight before the Department of Education was **Veterans Education Success Vice President for Legal Affairs, Della Justice**, who testified that, "the current system of state-based authorization... is unduly influenced by the regulated entities, and is designed primarily for purposes of administrative and financial convenience of the schools rather than protection of students and the federal taxpayers... Accreditation as it exists today is clearly failing in its federal responsibility to serve as a quality assurance tool, as evident in sudden closures and collapses of accredited institutions, government allegations of institutional deceptive practices, and prevalence of intolerable outcomes—e.g. low graduation rates, low job placement rates, high debt to earnings rates, and low repayment rates."

This rulemaking opportunity comes on the heels of a bill filed by Congresswoman Delia Ramirez that would reinstate GI Bill benefits to veterans who were defrauded by a predatory school. Currently, when a veteran uses their GI Bill benefits at a college that defrauds them, they are not eligible to have those benefits restored, even when the government proves the fraud and recovers GI Bill funds from the school. This protection *does* exist for traditional students and their federal loans, however, under "borrower defense to repayment" authority at the U.S. Department of Education.

#### **WHO:**

##### **Della Justice, Veterans Education Services Vice President for Legal Affairs**

**Della Justice** currently serves as the Vice President for Legal Affairs for Veterans Education Success. She previously worked as Assistant Attorney General in the Commonwealth of Kentucky Attorney General's Office for Consumer Protection. There

she became a state and national leader on unfair, false, misleading, and deceptive trade practices in the for-profit college industry. She served as the lead negotiator representing the interests of state attorneys general in a U.S. Department of Education negotiated rulemaking and presented on consumer protection concerns in higher education at several law enforcement conferences.

**Jasmine Thomas, Fort Campbell, KY**

"I do not understand how Fortis was allowed to change the requirements and allowed to use the HESI tests to keep me from graduating and taking the NCLEX. My husband and I even lost my vehicle because I couldn't work due to the classes and clinicals that were required. All while paying \$900 for daycare. I fought tooth and nail, and I am angry over how unfair this has been to me and my family."

**Ashley Beverly, Heartland, TX**

"Walden told me it would take 2-3 years to get my doctorate. I attended for four years without completing my degree, and they used up my GI Bill and I had to take out over \$90,000 in loans on top of my GI Bill. And the whole time I was attending, the quality of the program was extremely poor."

**Quenton Ross, Detroit, MI**

"I graduated from Full Sail in 2016 without having learned much of anything, and I never got a job in any way connected to my degrees. It is painfully obvious that I wasted my time and my student aid. I came out of Full Sail University having exhausted my GI Bill Benefits and with \$100,000 in loans."

**Deborah Butrim, Old Forge, PA**

"They made it seem like it would be fast and that it would be covered in full by my GI Bill. ... [yet] I never received any substantive feedback that would improve my work, just elementary edits. It was often just as simple as adding commas and semicolons. I was never allowed to progress past this phase."

**Glen Stroman, Jacksonville, FL**

"Early on, I had reservations about the quality of some of the classes. The teachers weren't teaching quality work. I took three classes that were basically the exact same course with a different name."

**Tyler Dean, Wilmington, NC**

"I complained to the Dean about the poor quality of the classes, and that I realized they did not have an engineering program accreditation even though they told me they were fully accredited. The Dean said that while they were not ABET accredited, if one of us would graduate they could get accredited, so I should just keep going."

**Veterans Education Success** is a nonpartisan organization whose mission is 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. The organization offers free help, advice, and college and career counseling to servicemembers, veterans, and their survivors and families using federal education benefits, and helps them participate in their democracy by engaging with policymakers. Veterans Education Success also provides non-partisan policy expertise to federal and state policymakers, and conducts non-partisan research on issues of concern to student veterans. Additional information is available at [www.vetsedsuccess.org](http://www.vetsedsuccess.org).