

MEDIA ADVISORY

Contact: Ana Cobian (323) 360-1827

ana.cobian@wardcirclestrategies.com

Local Veterans Sound Alarm on National Stage on Monday 3/4

Exposing How Unfair Practices, Poor-quality School Programs & “Sham Education Factories” Saddle Veterans with Debt & Fuel Student Debt Crisis

Veterans to Testify at US Department of Education Hearing on Strengthening Higher Ed School Oversight and Tightening Accreditation Standards

“No more YouTube videos passing for instruction”

WASHINGTON, DC – On **Monday, March 4**, student veterans from **Arizona, Florida, Illinois, and Maryland** who were mistreated by their school or defrauded by poor-quality schools join 20 veterans from across the country who previously testified in January and February before the US Department of Education -- blowing the whistle on lax oversight and widespread abuse as the government prepares to tighten college authorization and accreditation standards.

The testimony of these brave individuals comes as the federal government works to meet a November deadline to crack down on sham and low-quality colleges that [take money](#) from US taxpayers and students in exchange for too often worthless degrees.

Monday begins the third and last public comment period for the US Department of Education. The student veterans open to sharing their stories with the press will be available for 1:1 interviews after testifying; see the table below.

Veterans Asking Lawmakers To:

- **STOP! Allowing schools to provide only pre-recorded instruction or YouTube videos rather than live instruction.**
- **STOP! The bait and switch and ensure schools deliver the programs they promised.**
- **STOP! Leaving students in the lurch when accredited schools abruptly shut down.**
- **STOP! Nursing schools from inflating their state licensing pass rates by withholding graduation.**

Current Accreditation System Fails Veterans:

Widely criticized for its laxness, accreditors for colleges and universities often turn a blind eye to underperforming institutions and unfair practices. The standards used to assess educational quality are inadequate. This lax oversight allows higher ed programs to qualify for GI Bill benefits and federal student aid despite failing to deliver the educational value they advertise.

Veterans Testifying March 4-6, 2024 Available for Interviews:

REGISTER [HERE](#) TO WATCH LIVESTREAM

2024 TESTIMONY DATE & TIME	COLLEGE PROGRAM	FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	BRANCH	VETERAN'S TOWN	STATE	TESTIMONY
March 5 3:45 –3:48 pm ET	Herzing University	Amanda	Sacoto- Dunbar	Army	Tampa	FL	Available after veteran testifies
March 5 3:48 – 3:51 pm ET	DeVry	David	Thibodeau	Army National Guard	Germantown	MD	Available after veteran testifies
March 6 3:4 –3:48 pm ET	University of Phoenix	Galen	Stutesman	Marine Corps	Glendale	AZ	Available after veteran testifies
March 5 waitlist	AVTECH Institute of Technology	Doug	Denis	Air Force	Panama City	FL	Available after veteran testifies
March 5 waitlist	Art Institute	Caitlin	Kadell	Marine Corps	Jerseyville	IL	Available after veteran testifies
February 5 3:36-3:39 pm ET	Colorado Technical University	Cheri	Carter	Navy	Avon Township	IL	Student Veteran Submission: Cheri Carter Testimony to the Department of Education, February 2024
February 5 3:39 – 3:42 pm ET	Vista College	Kolin	Wilkins	Army	Houston	TX	Student Veteran Submission: Kolin Wilkins Testimony to the Department of Education, February 2024
February 6 3:36 – 3:39 pm ET	Living Arts College	Nico	Castillo	Army	Garner	NC	Student Veteran Submission: Nico Castillo Testimony to the Department of Education, February 2024

February 7 3:33 – 3:36 pm ET	Stratford University	Henry	Hawley	Navy	Robinfell	MN	Student Veteran Submission: Henry Hawley Testimony to the Department of Education, February 2024
February 7 3:36 – 3:39 pm ET	Fisk University	Sharon	Edwards	Military spouse	Clarksville	TN	Military Spouse Submission: Sharon Edwards Testimony to the Department of Education, February 2024
January 8 3:30-3:33 pm ET	Fortis Institute Nashville	Jasmine	Thomas	Military Spouse- Army	Fort Campbell KY and Ardmore OK	OK	Military Spouse Submission: Jasmine Thomas Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024
January 8 3:33-3:36 pm ET	Art Institute	Michael	Nelson	Army	Mansfield	TX	Student Veteran Submission: Michael Nelson Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024
January 8 3:48-3:51 pm ET	Ashford University	Angela	McMillen	Navy	Pierce	CO	Student Veteran Submission: Angela McMillen Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024
January 3:30-3:33 pm ET	Full Sail University	Adam	Young	Navy	Gilbert	AZ	Student Veteran Submission: Adam Young Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024

January 9 3:33-3:36 pm ET	Hondros College of Nursing	Luke	Downs	Army	Westerville	OH	Student Veteran Submission: Luke Downs Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024
January 9 3:42-3:45 pm ET	American InterContinental University	Sally	Olsen	Marines	Bloomington	IL	Student Veteran Submission: Sally Olsen Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024
January 9 3:45-3:48 pm ET	ITT Tech	Stephanie	Pollay	Air Force	Harleysville	PA	Student Veteran Submission: Stephanie Pollay Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024
January 10 3:33-3:36 pm ET	University of Phoenix	Jeri	Glenn	Navy	Copperas Cove	TX	Student Veteran Submission: Jeri Glenn Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024
January 11 3:30-3:33 pm ET	Grand Canyon University	Cynthia	Lawrence	Military Spouse- Army	Fayetteville and Harnett County	NC	Military Spouse Submission: Dr. Cynthia Lawrence Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024

- **Stop! Nursing Schools From Inflating Their State Licensing Pass Rates By Withholding Graduation:**

“Schools should not be allowed to keep students from graduating and from taking the NCLEX [a state licensure exam] based on the results of a practice test,” said former nursing school student veteran and **combat medic Luke Downs, from Ohio**, in

January. “Not only do [nursing students] need the degree to take the NCLEX, but even if they don’t become a nurse, they need their degree for other jobs.”

“I started going to Fortis in July 2020 with hopes that by 2022 I would receive my associate’s degree in Nursing and be able to provide for my family as a Registered Nurse. I was robbed of this,” said **Jasmine Thomas, a military spouse and mother of two from Oklahoma**. “I made it all the way to the end of the program after two years of a long commute to school, while my husband was deployed and I was taking care of two small children.”

(See additional information on the issue [here](#).)

- **Stop! Allowing Schools To Provide Only Pre-Recorded Instruction Or YouTube videos Rather Than Live Instruction.**

Texas Student Veteran Michael Nelson:

“My experience as a student [at **the Art Institute**] was less than ideal. The classwork took a ‘Do It Yourself’ approach to learning. Assignments consisted of watching YouTube videos with very little faculty engagement or hands-on learning.”

Texas Student Veteran Jeri Glenn:

“I was teaching myself from the textbook. Some of the instructors could not answer basic accounting questions and were very hard to get in touch with. The course was provided through questions and emails online. When instructors graded the work, and there was no feedback to help with our understanding.

I recalled the recruiters telling me that the accreditation was the same as any other school and that their credits would transfer anywhere. I tried transferring to a Texas community college, but they would not accept any credits from [the **University of Phoenix**].”

- **STOP! The Bait And Switch And Ensure Schools Deliver The Program They Promised**

Illinois Student Veteran Cheri Carter:

“I had spent fourteen months in an expensive program, and it turned out to be total junk. I am unable to get my GI Bill Benefits restored, and I will never, never get back the time I spent. Because [**Colorado Tech**] was approved, I thought it was legitimate.

It was near the end of my time at **Colorado Tech** that I realized we had been given what I call the ‘Dollar Store’ version of a medical billing and coding program. It did not have the accreditation that would make us eligible for the jobs we thought we could get.”

Tennessee Military Spouse Sharon Edwards:

“I felt deceived, discouraged, devastated, and disappointed...The gap between what [***Fisk University***] promised and what the school delivered left me with \$14,000 dollars of debt and used up half of the GI Bill benefits I had been granted.

Accreditors need to make sure colleges and universities are upfront and clear about what they offer, from recruitment to graduation.

After the completion of **58 credits**, I met with my advisor to see my next step for graduation, [as] I was approaching **my 60 credit hours**. The advisor for the first time informed me that the Human Development Leadership BS Degree was a 120-hour degree, and it was a requirement to have an associate degree prior to being enrolled in this program, [so] I would have to complete an additional 62 hours... to obtain that degree.”

Colorado Student Veteran Angela McMillen:

“After seven years at the school and over \$140,000 in loans, I ended up with only a Master's Degree that no one even recognizes as a Psychology degree.

While I was enrolled, [***Ashford University*** converted the program] from a Ph.D. to a Psy.D., which altered the focus of the curriculum. As someone deeply passionate about research in psychology, this change did not align with my academic and career aspirations. The Psy.D. program did not include the clinical work that is necessary for a Psy.D. degree. My dissertation was supposed to include work with clients, but there were no clinical hours.”

- **Stop! Leaving Students In The Lurch When Accredited Schools Abruptly Shut Down.**

Texas Student Veteran Michael Nelson:

“I entered my last term only two classes short of earning my degree. This is when we learned the [Art Institute] was closing immediately. The sudden closure has left me facing significant challenges...This has affected my immediate educational progress, [and] it has also jeopardized my long-term career goals. As students, we were left stranded without information about transcripts, tuition reimbursements, or viable options for continuing our education.”

Texas Student Veteran Kolin Wilkins:

“After the school's closure, I heard a news story that the owner of ***Vista College*** is now involved with another school, which just seems really unfair. I think more should be done to protect students and veterans from schools that are on the brink of closing.

I enrolled at **Vista College** to pursue an associate's degree in medical insurance coding and billing. I did not get any value for the GI Bill benefits I earned from my time in the Army. Five weeks before I was set to graduate, the school abruptly closed. We had no warning. Up until the last moment, we were being encouraged to sign up for new classes."

"Veterans are understandably outraged when they discover that an accredited school endorsed by both the Department of Education and the VA has squandered their hard-earned GI Bill benefits on a useless degree and substandard education," **says Della Justice, Vice President for Legal Affairs at Veterans Education Success**, a leading non-profit advocating for veterans' rights and the GI Bill.

"Veterans trust the government to oversee educational institutions, but the current system is failing them," Justice adds. "We commend the Department for initiating much-needed reforms. Now is the time to tighten standards and close the loopholes, ensuring veterans receive the education and outcomes they deserve."

Veterans and Subject Matter Experts from Veterans Education Success Are Available for 1:1 Interviews after Testifying; contact Ana Cobian at 323.360.1827; ana.cobian@wardcirclestrategies.com

Veterans Education Success is a bipartisan, nonprofit 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 postsecondary education programs. The organization offers free help, advice, and college and career counseling for the GI Bill. It helps veterans 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.

###