Media Advisory
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Local Veterans Sound Alarm on National Stage on Tuesday 3/5

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 Tuesday, March 5, 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2024 TESTIMONY DATE &amp; TIME</th>
<th>COLLEGE PROGRAM</th>
<th>FIRST NAME</th>
<th>LAST NAME</th>
<th>BRANCH</th>
<th>VETERAN’S TOWN</th>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>TESTIMONY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 5 3:45 –3:48 pm ET</td>
<td>Herzing University</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Sacoto-Dunbar</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>Tampa</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Available after veteran testifies</td>
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<td>March 5 3:48 – 3:51 pm ET</td>
<td>DeVry</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Thibodeau</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>National Guard</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Available after veteran testifies</td>
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<td>University of Phoenix</td>
<td>Galen</td>
<td>Stutesman</td>
<td>Marine Corps</td>
<td>Glendale</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>Available after veteran testifies</td>
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<td>March 5 waitlist</td>
<td>Art Institute</td>
<td>Caitlin</td>
<td>Kadell</td>
<td>Marine Corps</td>
<td>Jerseyville</td>
<td>IL</td>
<td>Available after veteran testifies</td>
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<td>February 5 3:36-3:39 pm ET</td>
<td>Colorado Technical University</td>
<td>Cheri</td>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>Avon Township</td>
<td>IL</td>
<td><strong>Student Veteran Submission: Cheri Carter Testimony to the Department of Education, February 2024</strong></td>
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<td>Vista College</td>
<td>Kolin</td>
<td>Wilkins</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td><strong>Student Veteran Submission: Kolin Wilkins Testimony to the Department of Education, February 2024</strong></td>
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<td>Nico</td>
<td>Castillo</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>Garner</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td><strong>Student Veteran Submission: Nico Castillo Testimony to the Department of Education, February 2024</strong></td>
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<td>Henry</td>
<td>Hawley</td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>Robinfell</td>
<td>MN</td>
<td><strong>Student Veteran Submission: Henry Hawley Testimony to</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Military Status</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Department of Education Submission</td>
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<td>January 8</td>
<td>3:30-3:33 pm ET</td>
<td>Fortis Institute Nashville</td>
<td>Jasmine Thomas</td>
<td>Military Spouse-Army</td>
<td>Fort Campbell, KY and Ardmore, OK</td>
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<td>Art Institute</td>
<td>Michael Nelson</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>Mansfield, TX</td>
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<td>Ashford University</td>
<td>Angela McMillen</td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>Pierce, CO</td>
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<td>Adam Young</td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>Gilbert, AZ</td>
<td>Student Veteran Submission: Adam Young Testimony to the Department of Education, January 2024</td>
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• **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
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.

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