



**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
119TH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION**

April 16, 2026

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

We thank you for the opportunity to present this statement for consideration for this hearing. 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.

In this statement, we address this timely and important hearing topic, “Bounce Houses, Drones, and Massage Chairs: A Review of VA’s Purchase History in the Veteran Readiness and Employment Program.”

As outlined in our previous statements to Congress, we have continued to receive complaints from veterans about Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E).^{1, 2, 3} Recent complaints continue to tell the story, including these core issues:

A. Veterans feel VR&E and its counselors steer them away from high-quality programs or push them to enroll in low-quality programs.

Many veterans have told us that VR&E counselors steer them away from top colleges and towards low-quality online programs. One recent veteran, a 100% disabled 12-year service member, was denied approval for an Ivy League business school. The counselor dismissed it as too expensive despite its clear career advantages and the likelihood of higher earnings. Veterans find the approval process arbitrary, as the same schools are approved for others.

¹ Veterans Education Success, “VES Written Statement on Evaluating the Effectiveness of VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Programs Before the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity” (Jun. 4, 2019),

https://vetsedsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/VES_SFR_VRE_06032019-1.pdf.

² Veterans Education Success, “Our Statement for the Record on the Topic of ‘Veteran Readiness and Employment: Is VA Succeeding?’” (Sept. 15, 2022),

<https://vetsedsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/VES-SFR-VRE-Hearing-HVAC-EO-September-15-2022.pdf>.

³ Veterans Education Success, “Our Statement for the Record on the Topic of ‘Examining the Effectiveness of the Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Program’” (Dec. 11, 2024),

<https://vetsedsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Statement-For-the-Record-VRE-HVAC-EO-Dec-2024.pdf>.

B. Veterans complain that applying for and using VR&E benefits is too difficult; counselors have denied their admission to the VR&E program, denied their education program, or refused to cover certain programmatic costs without a reasonable explanation, causing tremendous stress.

One veteran was denied funding for essential coursework materials, including a laptop, with no apparent reason beyond a vague claim of insufficient funds. Others report difficulty using VR&E for graduate or professional degrees, with counselors blocking doctoral programs and instead approving degrees that do not align with their disabilities or vocational goals. Some counselors improperly decide that advanced degrees are unnecessary, even after veterans have already started their programs. Many veterans believe counselors lack training to assess how disabilities impact career options.

C. VR&E counselors are often challenging to reach and do not provide timely information and responses to veterans.

Veterans frequently report unresponsive, incompetent, or even antagonistic counselors who seem more focused on disqualifying them than helping. Some are repeatedly reassigned counselors, receiving conflicting guidance and decisions. Many worry about retaliation.

One veteran considered withdrawing from VR&E entirely after a year without a response from his counselor. A medically retired Army veteran struggled for over six months to even start the program.

Based on the issues addressed above, we make the following recommendations for the Committees' consideration:

- **Staff Ratio.** Reduce the maximum client-to-counselor ratio from 125 to 85 to ensure veterans receive timely, individualized support. While VA has worked to reduce this number, 125 remains too high for counselors to address veterans' needs adequately, and veterans continue to report unresponsive counselors.
- **Counseling Consistency.** Require increased training for VR&E counselors to ensure consistent, high-quality guidance. Too many veterans are steered into low-quality schools while others are approved for top-tier institutions. Counselors should be trained to avoid recommending schools with federal caution flags or law enforcement actions. They should be empowered to approve graduate degrees when needed to help veterans achieve their vocational goals. Additional training and explicit guidance would improve program delivery and the veteran experience.
- **System Modernization.** Continue to improve and modernize the VR&E case management system to prevent payment delays and reduce administrative burdens. Given the financial hardships many veterans face, timely payments are critical. We commend the e-VA Document Repository and Automation Initiative, which significantly reduces the burden on both veterans and counselors by streamlining required documentation.
- **Housing Allowance Parity.** Establish a Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) for VR&E students at rates comparable to the Post-9/11 GI Bill to keep pace with rising living costs.⁴

⁴ Veterans Education Success, "Statement for the Record, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee Hearing, *Getting Veterans to Work after COVID-19*" (Jul. 21, 2020), <https://vetsedsuccess.org/our-sfr-for-july-21-hvac-economic-opportunity-subcommittee-hearing-getting-vet-erans-to-work-after-covid-19/>.

We thank the Subcommittee for its attention to this critical issue and consideration of these recommendations. We will continue to provide feedback based on what we hear from the veterans we work with on an ongoing basis.

Conclusion

Veterans Education Success sincerely appreciates the opportunity to provide our input and expertise on this topic. The higher education industry continues to evolve in these dynamic times, and we emphasize the importance of maintaining high standards. Student veterans, taxpayers, and Congress must expect the best outcomes from the use of hard-earned GI Bill benefits.

We look forward to working with you on these solutions and are grateful for the continued opportunities to collaborate further.

**Information Required by Rule XI, Clause 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives
and the Rules of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

Pursuant to Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, Veterans Education Success has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2026, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.

**Information Required by the Rules of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Regarding Foreign Government and Foreign Adversary Funding**

Pursuant to the Rules of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, and consistent with the definitions set forth in P.L. 118-50, Division H, § 2(g)(1), Veterans Education Success has not received any contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government, a foreign adversary-controlled entity, or an entity or country of particular concern.