

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Chairman, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester  
Ranking Member, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Takano  
Chairman, House Veterans Affairs Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe  
Ranking Member, House Veterans Affairs Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Impact of COVID-19 Course Changes on VA Education Benefits**

Dear Chairmen Moran and Takano, and Ranking Members Tester and Roe,

As a coalition representing millions of military-connected students, we call to your attention the recent coronavirus (COVID-19)-related class changes at colleges and universities, and the potential impact on the education benefits of military-connected students. We urge you to take swift action on legislation providing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with the necessary authority to ensure these students receive proper benefits if their schools make emergency or health-related course changes as our nation continues to respond to COVID-19.

More than 100 schools have closed and moved courses online in response to the spread of coronavirus in the United States in just the past few days.<sup>1</sup> That number increases daily. At this time, we estimate these campus changes will impact tens of thousands of GI Bill beneficiaries across the country. This number does not include spouses and children who depend on housing allowances as part of a family. While all students are affected by these course changes, many military-connected students face urgent and unique impacts regarding receipt of GI Bill benefits that are tied to specific types of course approval.

There are effectively three options for a program to be approved for VA education benefits: distance, hybrid, and in-residence education. At present, the impact on each of these modalities is as follows:

1. Distance Education: If a program was approved for a distance learning program, a student's MHA will not change this term under any circumstances.
2. Hybrid Education: If a program was approved for a hybrid learning program, a student's MHA will not change *this term*. Without a legislative solution, future terms may be reduced to half of the national average MHA because the course will be considered online.
3. In-Residence Education: Without a legislative solution, all VA benefits payments would stop if a program only approved for in-residence learning moves to online learning. This includes MHA *and* tuition payments because the program would be considered unapproved for VA benefits.

Military-connected students cannot help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by staying home if they lose those homes due to disrupted benefits. We urge you to act immediately to pass a bipartisan bill that clarifies VA's authority to administer VA education benefits by considering prior on-site courses as continuing on-site regardless of class changes implemented for emergency or health-related purposes.

We thank the Senate for taking swift action on the legislation today, which acknowledges the urgency of this issue. We ask the House of Representatives to follow suit and pass legislation as expeditiously as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Quintana, *Coronavirus college closings: More than 100 colleges cancel in-person classes and move online*, USA TODAY (March 11, 2020, 2:47 PM), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/03/11/coronavirus-college-closings-list-online-classes/5022256002/>.

We greatly appreciate the work of each of your offices and that of your colleagues on behalf of military-connected students to quickly address this issue. Please feel free to contact Justin Monk or Justin Hauschild directly if you should have any additional questions on this matter. They can be reached by phone at 202-223-4710 or by email at [justin.monk@studentveterans.org](mailto:justin.monk@studentveterans.org) and [justin.hauschild@studentveterans.org](mailto:justin.hauschild@studentveterans.org) respectively.

Most Respectfully,

Air Force Association  
Air Force Sergeants Association  
America's Warrior Partnership  
Army Aviation Association of America  
AMVETS  
Association of Military Surgeons of the United States  
Association of the United States Navy  
Blue Star Families  
California Advisory Council of Military Education  
The California State University  
Career Education Colleges and Universities  
Coast Guard Chief Warrant & and Warrant Officers Association  
The Code of Support Foundation  
Colorado Advisory Council of Military Education  
Colorado State University  
Council of College and Military Educators  
Council of Military Transition to Education  
Disabled American Veterans  
Fleet Reserve Association  
Florida Advisory Council of Military Education  
Florida Association of Veterans Educational Specialists  
Harvard University  
High Ground Veterans Advocacy  
The Independence Fund  
Indiana University  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America  
Jewish War Veterans of the USA  
Mid South Advisory Council of Military Education  
The Military Chaplains Association  
Military Officers Association of America  
Military Veterans Advocacy  
National Association of State Approving Agencies  
National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs  
National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators  
National Military Family Association  
National University  
Non Commissioned Officers Association  
The Ohio State University  
Paralyzed Veterans of America  
Penn State University  
Purdue University  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
Service to School  
Service Women's Action Network  
Student Veterans of America

Swords to Plowshares  
The Texas A&M System Office of Veterans Services  
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors  
TREA: The Enlisted Association  
United States Army Warrant Officers Association  
University of California System  
The University of Chicago's Booth Armed Forces Group, Law School Veterans, and Veteran Scholars League  
University of Florida  
University of Iowa  
University of Kansas  
University of Maryland Global Campus  
University of Michigan  
University of Nebraska  
University of New Mexico  
The University of North Carolina System Office  
University of Oregon  
University of San Diego Veterans Law Clinic  
University of Southern California  
University of Washington  
Veterans for Common Sense  
Vanderbilt University  
Veterans Education Success  
VetsFirst  
The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States  
Vietnam Veterans of America