

March 12, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Moran
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Takano
420 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe
102 Cannon House Office Building
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.¹ 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 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 while we simultaneously allow the benefits paying for those homes to be disrupted. 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 and taking action to pass legislation today, which acknowledges the

¹ 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/>.

urgency of this issue. The House of Representatives should follow suit and pass legislation as expeditiously as possible.

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 and justin.hauschild@studentveterans.org respectively.

Most Respectfully,

Student Veterans of America