

Congresswoman Susan W. Brooks (IN-05) – Statement for the Record
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3218, the Harry W. Colmery Veterans
Educational Assistance Act of 2017

House Veterans Affairs Committee

July 17, 2017

I'd like to thank Chairman Roe, Ranking Member Walz, and the members of the committee for their hard work on this bipartisan package that will reform and ultimately improve our veteran's access to GI Bill benefits. We owe a debt of gratitude to the brave men and women who served our country, and I'm proud that my bill, H.R. 1104, the Veterans To Enhance Studies Through (TEST) Accessibility Act, is included in this package.

The Veterans TEST Accessibility Act does just what its title implies—it provides our veterans with simpler, fairer access to tests. It fixes an outdated statute that hinders rather than helps our veterans use their GI Bill benefits to access tests like the SAT and prior learning assessments. Current law requires veterans to use a full month of their GI Bill eligibility to be reimbursed for licensing, certification and national tests, regardless of how much the test costs. Such tests open new doors to employment and allow veterans to advance and enhance their education and career. Given the relatively low cost of many tests, it often simply isn't worth it for veterans to lose potential reimbursement for an entire month of other educational expenses, like tuition. My bill fixes that. It allows veterans to be reimbursed for approved licensing, certification, and national tests, while still eligible to use their remaining GI Bill benefits for additional educational expenses in the same month.

Under the bill, a veteran can be reimbursed for an approved test at a pro-rated amount based on their percentage of coverage under the post-9/11 GI Bill. That is, they would only pay for the amount of the test and can still utilize the remaining eligibility they have to cover other educational expenses incurred that month.

Unemployment and underemployment continue to be a concern for young veterans especially, and a recent CareerBuilder survey found that 22 percent of veterans were underemployed and 20 percent were employed at low-paying jobs. Veterans have the skills and experience that colleges, universities, and employers are looking for, but face challenges that their civilian counterparts do not, including a lack of licensure or certification. This bill will give our veterans the tools they need to compete in the job market and help address veteran underemployment and unemployment. With this bill, veterans are able to take what they learned prior to and during their military service and use the benefits they have earned to advance their education and career.

I'm also thrilled that another bill I am an original cosponsor of, H.R. 1989, the VET TEC Act, introduced by Leader McCarthy, is included in this package. Current law allows veterans to access traditional education through the post-9/11 GI Bill, but the VET TEC Act empowers veterans to leverage new education models, for example, coding boot camps, to attain the

technological skills needed in the 21st century workforce. Rapid technological advancements have created jobs that our veterans interested in careers in the technology economy can and should fill. Our veterans are well equipped to learn these skills and can help achieve the goal of closing the skills gap.

In closing, I'd like to again thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and all of my colleagues who have contributed to this important piece of legislation. I'd also like to thank Congresswoman Rice for being my bipartisan co-lead on H.R. 1104. This bipartisan package will help our veterans gain access to the resources they need to make a life for themselves after returning to civilian life. As the number of post-9/11 veterans continues to grow, I am pleased that this bill is moving forward so that the millions of veterans currently eligible can access the benefits they have earned and deserve.