



TESTIMONY OF

STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:

“PENDING LEGISLATION”

JUNE 14, 2021

Chairwoman Brownley, Ranking Member Bergman, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America (SVA) to submit testimony on the pending legislation being considered. With a mission focused on empowering student veterans, SVA is committed to providing an educational experience that goes beyond the classroom.

Through a dedicated network of more than 1,500 on-campus chapters in all 50 states and four countries overseas representing more than 750,000 student veterans, SVA aims to inspire yesterday's warriors by connecting student veterans with a community of like-minded chapter leaders. Every day these passionate leaders work to provide the necessary resources, network support, and advocacy to ensure student veterans can effectively connect, expand their skills, and ultimately achieve their greatest potential.

Draft legislation to amend title 38, United States Code, to furnish Vet Center readjustment counseling and related mental health services to veterans and members of the Armed Forces using certain educational assistance benefits.

SVA supports this draft legislation, which would expand access to VA Vet Centers for veterans using VA educational benefits.

As shared in our recent testimony outlining our annual policy priorities before the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees, SVA is committed to viewing and advocating for the GI Bill as the front door to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).¹ This commitment is driven by VA's Journey of Veterans Map which highlights the GI Bill as one of the first interactions recently transitioned veterans will have with VA.²

This means a seamless GI Bill process, and welcoming transitioning veterans into additional VA services, is key to establishing trust and confidence in the agency that could last a lifetime. A critical part of establishing that trust and confidence during the transition period should also include ready and easy access to mental health care options, such as those provided at VA Vet Centers.

Since their founding in the years post-Vietnam, VA Vet Centers have provided vital reintegration and transition counseling at the community level.³ With 300 locations across the country supplemented by mobile options, Vet Centers provide confidential counseling with the option to seek care outside traditional office hours.⁴ As post-traditional students, student veterans are often balancing work and family obligations in addition to the demands of school, making the flexibility and access available at Vet Centers particularly suited to meet student veteran needs.

Based on SVA's public opinion surveys, respondents listed healthcare and mental health care services as the top two issues areas veteran service organizations should focus their advocacy efforts.⁵ While not a whole solution, VA Vet Centers do provide counseling and referral services that would help address that need and continue to build a more welcoming front door to the whole of VA during their transition.

¹ STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA, TESTIMONY BEFORE THE H. AND S. COMMS. ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS ON LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES OF 2021 117th Cong., 6-7 (March 3, 2021), available at <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/download/sva-testimony>.

² See generally *Journeys of Veterans Map*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, *Journeys of Veterans Map*, <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Veteran-Journey-Map.pdf>; (last visited Feb. 25, 2021); *VA Welcome Kit*, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, *VA Welcome Kit* (Nov. 12, 2020) <https://www.va.gov/welcome-kit>.

³ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS. *Vet Centers 42 Years Serving Veterans*. <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/90512/vet-centers-42-years-serving-veterans/>.

⁴ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS. *Vet Center Services*. https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Vet_Center_Services.asp

⁵ SVA public opinion survey data collected August 2020

o

The continued success of veterans in higher education in the Post-9/11 era is no mistake or coincidence. In our Nation's history, educated veterans have always been *the best of a generation* and the key to solving our most complex challenges. This is the legacy we know today's student veterans carry.

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the Subcommittee Members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans' health care and higher education. As always, we welcome your feedback and questions.

