

**Remarks of Rep. Greg Murphy on
HR 4233: The Student Veterans Counseling Centers Eligibility Act**

Today, I advocate for HR 4233: *The Student Veterans Counseling Centers Eligibility Act*, which I introduced alongside Ranking Member Bost last month. I know we are all acutely aware of the difficulties veterans often have in transition back to civilian life, especially for those looking to further their education.

Additionally, we far too often see the tragedy of our selfless defenders losing their battle to mental health issues when returning from service. The intention of this bill is to aid more of our veterans who are readjusting to civilian lives by providing overdue access to vital mental health resources. This issue is especially personal to my district, as I represent 89,000 veterans, many of whom are or will be receiving benefits via the Post-9/11 GI Bill or the Montgomery GI Bill.

I urge this committee to see this bill for what it is: an effective and straightforward way to address one of the most pressing issues for the veterans across our nation. We have an obligation to make counseling services more accessible for veterans, regardless of which side of aisle we sit on.

The *Student Veterans Counseling Centers Eligibility Act* would provide expanded counseling and mental health support services to student veterans through the VA's Readjustment Counseling Centers, known as "Vet Centers." These centers provide individual, group, marriage, and family counseling and peer

support opportunities for active duty servicemembers, veterans, members of the National Guard and Reserve, and certain military family members. Vet Centers are community-based, confidential, and free.

A recent RAND study shows that 20% of veterans on the GI bill face issues with either feelings of depression or PTSD. That 20% amounts to over 170,000 veterans. That's almost double the number of total veterans in my district. The current option of student veterans using school psychologists provides little relief for these veterans. The Director of Policy and Advocacy for the National Association of School Psychologists has reported that the national ratio of school psychologists to students is 1:2,000 and can be as bad as 1:5,000 at some schools.

I have heard personal stories from students who have had to wait weeks or even months for a mental health appointment if their mental health crisis was not deemed in need of "immediate attention." Unfortunately, many of our veterans do not have the luxury of weeks or months to wait to see a professional mental health provider.

In addition, many university mental health counselors are not actually licensed professionals but are instead graduate and doctoral students. Our veterans deserve the best care from the most qualified professionals.

The other option currently presented to our veterans is private mental health care. While the private option offers more flexibility, it is cost prohibitive for many using GI Bill benefits. An average therapy session can cost between \$60-\$120, with the higher end of costs reaching prices of up to \$250 per session. Even with health insurance, premiums often amount to \$50 a session.

Helping veterans succeed in school and in their civilian lives is one of most important ways to thank them for their service. Leaving the military and going back to school can be a particularly stressful and difficult time for separating servicemembers.

The VA currently estimates the takes suicide rate at 18 of our beloved service members a day. 46% of military students reported suicidal thoughts compared to only 6% of their non-military peers. If we can provide mental health services that are able to assist just a single veteran who is contemplating suicide choose to live, then I believe it is our sworn duty to do so. We have that opportunity now. Education poses one of the most beneficial yet stressful areas of transitions for our veterans. **Quite frankly, the provisions added in this bill serve to complete what now amounts to an imperfect GI bill.**

I am proud to sponsor this bill and am very grateful to Ranking Member Bost for his support as an original cosponsor. This is also supported by Student

Veterans of America. I appreciate every committee members' consideration of this vital legislation, and I urge its consideration for passage.