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**TESTIMONY OF  
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VICE PRESIDENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**BEFORE THE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R. 2942, H.R. 3056, H.R. 3614, H.R. 4031,  
H.R. 4037, H.R. 4038, H.R. 4147, H.R. 4150, AND H.R. 4151**

**MARCH 25, 2014**



Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America to submit written testimony regarding pending legislation intended to increase support for military servicemembers and veterans.

Student Veterans of America (SVA) is the largest and only national association of military Veterans in higher education. Our mission is to provide military veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education and after graduation. We currently have nearly 1,000 chapters, or student veteran organizations, at colleges and universities in all 50 states, that assist veterans in their transition to and through higher education. This on-the-ground perspective, which comes from every corner of this nation, and our experience in supporting thousands of GI Bill beneficiaries, provides the framework for our testimony regarding these important issues.

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**H.R. 2942, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to reestablish the Professional Certification and Licensure Advisory Committee of the Department of Veterans Affairs.**

SVA supports the reestablishment of this Committee as it is clear that this committee is a necessary entity. While the Department of Veterans Affairs currently performs outreach and auditing for licensing and certification programs, the extension would streamline those efforts and contribute to clear communication with State approving agencies presently act in a similar capacity. For these reasons, SVA sees this as a committee of necessity to address existing gaps by allowing applicable military experiences to be translated to civilian recognition.

**H.R. 3056, Warriors’ Peer-Outreach Pilot Program Act**

SVA stands firmly with the intent behind the legislation proposed by Rep. Takano in establishing metric-proven success of peer-to-peer support networks for veterans in higher education. With close to 1,000 chapters across the country which operate on this model, SVA strongly believes in the importance of peer-to-peer support in higher education—indeed a core precept of our organization.

However, with ample evidence available already, both anecdotal and data-driven, of the success of peer-to-peer programs with regards to veterans pursuing postsecondary degrees, SVA does not support H.R. 3056. At present, SVA provides tools and resources for student veterans to act both formally and informally to support their veteran peers throughout their educational experience. In addition to a breadth of day-to-day support provided by chapter leaders for student veterans at the local level, SVA also provides an array of programmatic training that encourages outcomes which mirror the intent of this legislation. Our *Leadership Institute Series* teaches practical skills



that apply directly to supporting effective peer-to-peer mentoring, as well as skills which translate beyond school and focus on building fulfilling careers.

Others have also seen this approach of peer-to-peer support as a successful model, and have implemented it widely. In Washington State, the VetSuccess Americorps program has been an excellent example of success, placing 64 AmeriCorps members on as many as 32 college campuses for the 2013-14 academic year. With rigorous reporting and metrics associated with that program, SVA believes that no additional proof is necessary to substantiate the positive impact that peer-to-peer support can have.

SVA stands with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion in accepting that peer-to-peer support in higher education is a known factor of success of veterans in higher education, with no further legislation required to execute additional study.

#### **H.R. 3614, Military Skills to Careers Act**

This bill seeks to ensure that military professionals have the opportunity to sit for licensing exams, allowing veterans the opportunity to successfully translate their military expertise and effectively integrate into the civilian workforce.

The skills veterans learn in the military match those required for civilian job licenses, and this legislation would permit veterans to obtain only those licenses for which they are qualified. We know there exists substantial overlap between the training of veterans, state licenses that do not fully credit military experience, and current labor market needs.

This legislation recommends allowing for the recognition of the investment that our Department of Defense has made in our service members, now veterans. It makes it possible for economic needs for critical skills positions, which align directly with veterans' prior training and experience, to be addressed. SVA carries reservation in establishing this legislation as a precursor to awarding grants or contracts to states, which may ultimately inhibit the overall intent of this bill.

SVA would look forward to providing further input on this legislation to achieve an outcome that we would fully support.

#### **H.R. 4037, Improving Veterans' Access to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Act**

**2014**

Vocational rehabilitation is a crucial component in the transition process as veterans move from active service to the civilian population. The Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI Bills provide notable examples of the role that education plays in this transition process. American taxpayers have



invested billions of dollars in programs that empower veterans to seek education that will allow them to attain gainful employment and meaningful careers.

Chairman Flores' bill seeks to ensure that the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program is equipped to provide rehabilitation programs to the veterans who have the greatest demand for these services.

In the bill's current form, SVA does not support H.R. 4037, though we feel this issue should stay at the forefront of discussion. With some changes to the language, which would otherwise potentially lead to some veterans being caught in a gap, SVA would support this legislation.

### **H.R. 4038, Veterans Benefits Administration Information Technology Improvement Act of 2014**

SVA is in strong favor of Chairman Flores' bill, H.R. 4038. Educational benefits claims processing is a persistent issue for veterans who would benefit from spending their time on their studies versus trying to manage a claim to an earned benefit. Even a small percentage of claims going unprocessed or delayed is unacceptable, as the impact is immediate and with lasting effects.

For those who have experienced challenges in their claims being processed, they know all-too-well what kind of chain effect this can have on their ability attend school and gain the full value of their educational benefits. Electronic adjudication of these benefits will greatly reduce user-error, and speed up the processing time for these benefits. An automated benefits processing of educational benefits should be a top priority of the Department of Veterans Affairs and SVA encourages the swift passage of H.R. 4038.

### **H.R. 4147, Student Veterans IT Upgrade Act**

As with Chairman Flores' legislation, H.R. 4038, this legislation proposed by Rep. Takano is a key component of modernizing the technical capabilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Public knowledge of the state of the IT infrastructure is a critical first-step in being able to address additional issues that stem from an inability to clearly understand what upgrades need to be performed. This understanding, along with an action plan to address finalizing each system, will send a clear signal that the Department of Veterans Affairs is actively seeking to follow-through on their intent to bring these systems to full implementation.

SVA stands behind Rep. Takano on H.R. 4147 to pursue the upgrade of information technology infrastructure necessary to support the education benefits claims of veterans as they seek higher education.

### **H.R. 4150, Veterans Employment and Training Service Longitudinal Study Act of 2014**

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, we released our initial findings of our *Million Records Project*, an SVA-led research



study of veterans in higher education in collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Student Clearinghouse. As we look at H.R. 4150, we find it to be complementary to our research, and within the spirit of seeking data-driven decisions on programs to support veterans in higher education.

Since our organization's inception, we have held that the lifecycle of a veteran's transition from the military, to school, and onward to civilian careers, is a highly interdependent process. Each component of this process builds on the preceding steps, and this legislation seeks to empower veterans through several critical steps.

The Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) can build a bridge for millions of veterans over the coming years as they pursue gainful careers post-graduation, for example. However, the current lack of coordination and understanding of the breadth of impact surrounding this part of the transition process is a crucial gap that must be addressed. SVA applauds the interest in moving towards the goal of gaining greater clarity on the impact of job counseling, training, and placement of veterans.

In 2012, the GAO noted that the federal government has sponsored six different programs serving at least 880,000 participants at a cost of \$1.2 billion dollars. Such a broad variety of resources might be seen as a positive attribute, and certainly reflects the sea of goodwill that has developed over the past decade. However, without coordination, duplicative efforts and inefficiencies threaten to stymie the full potential of these resources.

A study, as this legislation proposes, would enable decision makers at multiple levels to understand what is working. As well, the study would highlight areas for change.

SVA is in full support of H.R. 4150, and applauds the legislation for being fully inclusive of all individuals entitled to any kind of educational assistance.

### **H.R. 4151, Veterans Education Survey Act of 2014**

SVA stands in strong favor of Rep. Bilirakis' legislation, H.R. 4151, "Veterans Education Survey Act of 2014". It is right for some American's to ask, "What are we receiving for our investment in the GI Bill?" Indeed, this is a crucial question as more than \$34 billion dollars has been spent on millions of veterans who have sought, and are seeking, degrees in higher education.

As previously noted, our Million Records Project has sought to answer that question. H.R. 4151 is an important piece of legislation because it answers another key element of this investment in our veterans, "What motivates veterans to pursue the paths that they do?"

We know that a majority of our service members elect to pursue higher education as they transition out of the military. With an expected 1 million new veterans to enter the civilian population over the next several years, the importance of empowering veterans in higher



education will continue to increase. As individuals gain degrees in higher education, their earning power increases significantly. We also know that veterans who earn an initial degree in higher education have a much greater potential to pursue additional degrees, increasing their overall opportunity to contribute to the economy.

Through the Million Records project, there are several data points have gained great insight on, and when paired with the data that would be collected through a study directed by this legislation, the picture will become even clearer; a holistic narrative will form, enabling policy makers to base their decisions on accurate data. From the research of the Million Records Project, we have identified what school sectors are performing well, what graduation rates for veterans looks like, and time-to-completion of degree, among many other critical attributes.

This legislation would add another element to that picture: factors that impact the paths veterans pursue in higher education. As a customer satisfaction survey, policy regarding what can be done to improve the effectiveness of the educational benefits for veterans becomes increasingly applicable. The more data available on these topics, the better.

Since 2000, over 4 million veterans have benefited from use of the GI Bill, and the American taxpayers can expect that this generation of veterans will positively impact the American economy in magnitudes that will continue for several generations to come. SVA encourages the swift passage of this important legislation, and applauds the efforts of all policy makers who are making it clear that an investment in our veterans and their education is an investment in this country's future.

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SVA finds the following bill outside the scope of our mission and does not wish to offer comment at this time:

**H.R. 4031, Department of Veterans Affairs Management Accountability Act of 2014**

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Student Veterans of America is appreciative of the opportunity to provide this testimony. We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member and the Subcommittee members for their time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans in higher education. We look forward to continuing to work with this Subcommittee, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, and the Congress to ensure the success of all generations of Veterans through education.

Thank you for allowing Student Veterans of America the opportunity to participate in this



important Hearing.

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