



Student Veterans of America  
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**TESTIMONY OF**

**MS. VALRICA MARSHALL DUNMYER**

**CHIEF OF STAFF & CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

**STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**BEFORE THE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:**

**"A REVIEW OF THE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM"**

**JANUARY 27, 2015**



Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Takano and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for calling this hearing and for continuing to monitor efforts to successfully transition our returning Veterans out of the military and into civilian life.

My name is Valrica Marshall Dunmyer and I am here as the Chief of Staff and Chief Financial Officer of Student Veterans of America. I am also here as a veteran who served 26 years of Army service.

We are honored that you've invited us to be a part of this session today. On behalf of SVA and its more than 400,000 student veterans within a network of more than 1,200 chapter affiliates, I am pleased to submit our testimony on, "A Review of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)."

SVA advocates for the rights of veterans in higher education, rooted in the belief that investing in America's veterans today is a smart investment for the country tomorrow.

SVA's top priorities include improving access to higher education and scaling effective services that empower student veterans to graduate on time, with little-to-no student debt, and successfully transition into a civilian life.

### **Current Implementation of Transition GPS**

Mr. Chairman, as a former recipient of the current program, the enhancements came as both a surprise and welcomed addition to better educate and inform service members of their options when departing the military.

Nevertheless, transitional challenges still exist as evidenced through the continuing struggle of our veterans, and more specifically our student veterans.

### **Issues & Recommendations**

One of the primary challenges is knowing whether the TAP GPS program is truly working on the front end to produce the desired outcome on the back end.

As of December 2, 2013, only 72% of TAP locations included the higher education track offered by the DOD.<sup>i</sup> Now, this may seem like a high number to you and something to be proud of, but consider for a moment, if you're that veteran in the 28% group and your release date is quickly approaching. Imagine that you're that veteran, who is thinking about getting your degree, but haven't been provided with the resources or knowledge on how to even start the process. For those veterans, the system isn't working.

Our Million Record Project represents one of the most comprehensive examinations of student veterans' postsecondary academic success in decades. The initial results are a critical first step in filling research gaps regarding student veteran outcomes. The Million Records Project showed that more than 1 million veterans have used educational benefits from 2002–2010. Data also indicates that there will be over 5



million veterans by 2020<sup>ii</sup>. These facts, coupled with ongoing budgetary constraints, prove that we can no longer hope that our brick and mortar delivery of information is sufficient.

We must be innovative in our approach to the delivery while still ensuring the quality of information provided to our veterans. Most veterans frown on the current delivery method, describing the TAP program as “death by PowerPoint” due to the lengthy and enormous amount of information delivered. While the basic information, such as how many months an eligible veteran has of Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, should continue to be included, we should ensure our entire instructional program is informed through research, best practices and feedback.

As service members contemplate pursuing a degree following the military, the utilization of VSOs and VSAs can be looked upon as being a force multiplier, providing the necessary link between departure from the military and a veteran’s introduction into civilian life. Veteran Service organizations, like SVA, have proven track records of success to its members both current and Alumni and should have a seat at the table in further discussions.

### **Our Final Thoughts**

Through research, connection with local SVA chapters, and advocacy, we know that the better informed and prepared student veterans are, the greater the contributions and return on the investment for our Nation. By integrating SVA and other VSO’s into the Assessing Higher Education tract, we can assist in assuring that same level of success for all Vets transitioning into higher education.

Mr. Chairman, at SVA, we are extremely proud of the impact and reach we have into making a difference in the lives of our Student Veterans. To give you a better appreciation of the breadth of our involvement with student veterans, I’d like to share an email with you that we received from a student vet that attended our most recent annual national conference. One of my staffers commented that it gave him goose bumps when he read it:

*My name is Michael McCaffrey--I'm a senior at the University of Memphis and a chairman of our Student Veteran Organization on campus. The San Antonio conference was the first SVA conference I've attended, and the entire experience was unlike anything I've had the opportunity to do regarding Veterans. I am already anxiously awaiting details regarding next year's conference and will be attending as well.*

*With that said, I wanted to share a photo with you, which is attached to this e-mail. Although I do not know who captured this moment, this photo is of MoH recipient Kyle Carpenter and I, embracing one another after Vice President Biden's speech. The photo was originally posted on the morning of January 23rd by Kyle, on his personal Instagram account, @chiksdigscars, where users engaged it via likes, comments, and tagging at a rapid rate.*

*At the time, we were both unaware anyone was taking the picture, however if asked to describe it in one word, I would use "powerful". I wanted to share this photo with the SVA, because your dedication and advocacy efforts to Student Veterans is exceptional, however, at the core of the SVA, I believe the best thing you do is*



*simply bring Veterans together, who are trying to achieve great things, while keeping the battlefield in the rearview mirror.*

*The opportunity to meet your staff, Kyle, and other Veterans in San Antonio was worth the trip alone. When you factor in the discussion panels, speakers, corporate networking, and other events, the added value of attending increased dramatically. I hope this picture brings as much joy to you, as it did for me and so many other Veterans who have seen it. This powerful moment was possible, because of your ability to organize and commence a successful conference for Student Veterans to attend.*

*Best*

*Michael McCaffrey  
University of Memphis, Fogelman College of Business and Economics  
Student Veteran Organization Chairman*

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the subcommittee members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans in higher learning. We invite the subcommittee members to be a part of our National agenda as we showcase the great contributions our Veterans continue to make to our great Nation.

Again, we extend our sincere thanks to the Subcommittee and we look forward to continuing to work with this subcommittee, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and the Congress to ensure the success of all generations of veterans. Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, Report to Congressional Committees. "Transitioning Veterans: Improved Oversight Needed to Enhance Implementation of Transition Assistance Program." March 2014

<sup>iii</sup> Chairman Carper, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Chair Tom Harkin, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. Letter to the Honorable Jessica L. Wright, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. January 13, 2014.