

Addendum: Extended Remarks of Rep. Jim Himes (CT-04)

“H.R. 3634, the Securing Electronic Records for Veterans’ Ease (SERVE) Act”

For the House Committee Veterans’ Affairs

Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

October 13, 2017

Thank you Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O’Rourke for the opportunity to extend my remarks on H.R. 3634, the Securing Electronic Records for Veterans’ Ease, or SERVE Act.

H.R. 3634 would require the Department of Veteran Affairs make documentation of Post-9/11 GI Bill monthly housing stipend accessible and available online. Student veterans will use this documentation to provide needed verification to housing agents, leasing companies, apartment managers, and landlords.

During the second panel of the testimony on Wednesday, October 11th, MG (Major General) Robert M. Worley II (Ret.) stated that the VA supported the intent of the bill, but similar information is currently available in a recently launched Statement of Benefits letter, which is printable and accessible through Vets.gov. It was further explained that the letter provides a link to the amount of a veteran’s monthly housing stipend and other benefits and eligibility information under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

The intent of this bill is to provide our veterans with a letter that can certify that they receive the Post-9/11 GI Bill BAH stipend, something that a reasonable person would consider to qualify as proof of income (POI). The statement of benefits available to veterans is insufficient. To illustrate this point I submit for the record documents from the VA’s websites –Vets.gov and e-benefits- to include the Statement of Benefits letter that MG Worley II referenced during his testimony, as well as a benefit verification letter that provides documentation verifying disability compensation.

The VA’s new Post-9/11 GI Bill Statement of Benefits letter (Exhibit A.1) contains the veteran’s name, date of birth, file number, eligibility percentage, total months of benefits earned, the number of months used, the number of months remaining and the date in which the benefits will expire. This information has no value for a student who needs proof that they receive a housing stipend. It does not even clarify if the veteran is currently receiving benefits.

The hyperlink “find out how much money you can expect to get based on your eligibility percentage” takes the veteran to the GI Bill Comparison tool (Exhibit A.2). This tool is not linked to the veteran or their individual statement of benefits. In fact, the tool has multiple, drop-down menus to select military status; GI Bill benefit; amount of cumulative Post-9/11 active duty service; class preference; and a search box with input for a zip code, a school, location or

employer to search benefits information not based on or associated directly with the veteran. Entering the zip code for Washington, D.C. lists benefits based on the academic institution (Exhibit A.3). The result says “You may be eligible for up to: Tuition (annually) 100% in-state, Housing (monthly) \$2312, Books (annually) \$1000.” Though this is an excellent planning tool to allow veterans to weigh their options when using their education benefits, it is abysmally lacking in terms of the VA’s testimony before the subcommittee that this information is similar to what my bill would require.

The VA benefit verification letter (Exhibit B) is easily accessible through e-benefits and serves as the reference point for Sec. 2 of H.R. 3634 “(j) Provision of Housing Stipend Payment Information.” This letter clearly certifies the amount of money a veteran is receiving and the purpose of the benefit.

I urge the Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the subcommittee to look at and consider the exhibits submitted.

Veterans need housing. Student veterans and other eligible beneficiaries need to have suitable proof of income in order to do this.

Again, I would like to thank the subcommittee for its consideration of the Securing Electronic Records for Veteran’s Ease Act and I continue to look forward to working with the members of the committee to continue to support our student veterans.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Post-9/11 GI Bill[®] Statement of Benefits

The information in this letter is the Post-9/11 GI Bill Statement of Benefits for the beneficiary listed below as of October 13, 2017. Any pending or recent changes to enrollment may affect remaining entitlement.

Name:

[REDACTED]

Date of birth:

May 10, [REDACTED]

VA file number:

XXXXX-[REDACTED]

Regional Processing Office:

Buffalo, NY

Your Benefits

Total months received:

36 months, 0 days

Months you've used:

35 months, 5 days

Months you have left to use:

0 months, 25 days

Your eligibility percentage is **100%**.

[Find out how much money you can expect to get based on your eligibility percentage.](#)

Benefit End Date

You have until **July 24, 2025** to use these benefits.

Exhibit A.2 VA GI Bill Comparison tool (Vets.gov)

GI Bill® Comparison Tool

Learn about education programs and compare benefits by school.

What is your military status?

Veteran

Which GI Bill benefit do you want to use? ([Learn more](#))

Post-9/11 GI Bill (Ch 33)

Cumulative Post-9/11 active duty service ([Learn more](#))

36+ months: 100% (includes BASIC)

How do you want to take classes?

- ☐ Online only
- ☐ In person only
- ☐ In person and online

Enter a city, school or employer name

Search Schools

What's your plan?

Transitioning to civilian life takes preparation, research, planning, and the right tools. We're here to help you make the right decisions on where to use your hard earned benefits!

Exhibit A.3 GI Bill Comparison tool –results for Washington, D.C. (Vets.gov)

How do you want to take classes?

- ☐ Online only
- ☒ In person only
- ☐ In person and online

UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

WASHINGTON, DC

88 GI Bill Students

You may be eligible for up to:

 Tuition (annually):	100% in-state
 Housing (monthly):	\$2,312
 Books (annually):	\$1,000

[View details >](#)

UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA-COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WASHINGTON, DC

29 GI Bill Students

You may be eligible for up to:

 Tuition (annually):	100% in-state
 Housing (monthly):	\$2,312
 Books (annually):	\$1,000

[View details >](#)

UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA- DAVID A CLARKE LAW SCHOOL

WASHINGTON, DC

15 GI Bill Students

You may be eligible for up to:

 Tuition (annually):	100% in-state
 Housing (monthly):	\$2,312
 Books (annually):	\$1,000

[View details >](#)

[About this Tool](#)  [Download Data on All Schools \(Excel\)](#) 

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

October 13, 2017

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

In Reply Refer to:
xxx-xx [REDACTED]
27/eBenefits

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]:

This letter certifies that [REDACTED] is receiving service-connected disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The current benefit paid is as follows:

Gross Benefit Amount	\$1, [REDACTED].71
Net Amount Paid	\$1, [REDACTED].71
Effective Date	January 29, 2017
Combined Evaluation	70 percent

How You Can Contact Us

- If you need general information about benefits and eligibility, please visit us at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov> or <http://www.va.gov>.
- Call us at 1-800-827-1000. If you use a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), the number is 1-800-829-4833.
- Ask a question on the Internet at <https://iris.va.gov>.

Sincerely,

Executive Director
Benefits Assistance Service

Exhibit B. VA Benefit Verification Letter