

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

I appreciate you allowing me to testify today for my bill, the Reserve Component Vocational Rehabilitation Parity Act.

Let me first thank General Bergman, who joined me to introduce this bill, and the five of our committee colleagues who cosponsored the bill.

I also want to thank the committee staff for their valuable work on this as well.

Many guardsmen and reservists have realized they don't qualify for all of their benefits since the Department of Defense began using their new authority to call up Reserve Components for involuntary service.

This new authority unintentionally excluded these guardsmen and reservists. Thankfully, Ranking Member Walz and Mr. Palazzo have taken the lead to secure equal benefits for them, and we passed a few important fixes in the Forever GI Bill last year.

One unresolved issue is access to vocational rehabilitation.

This VA program provides critical job training that helps servicemembers and veterans find their career path after service.

Upon separation, veterans must use their vocational-rehab benefits within 12 years. But upon separation from active duty, a reservist could be called to spend some of those months or years deployed.

Currently, two reservists serving side-by-side on active duty may not have access to the same amount of vocational-rehab benefits. A reservist who *volunteered* to serve will have their vocational-rehab benefits extended for the time they are deployed; the reservist who is *involuntarily* deployed will *not*.

Additionally, the reservist who is involuntarily called up may be making sacrifices by leaving their family or a civilian job, compared to a reservist who volunteered.

These guardsmen and reservists have served honorably in missions to support combat zones.

They have earned the same employment and education benefits as any other reservist through their service.

My bill will ensure reservists and guardsmen will have access to the full 12-year window for reservists to use their vocational-rehab benefits.

I'm proud that my bill is supported by the National Guard Association of the United States and the Reserve Officers Association.

I also want to commend my colleague, Ms. Brownley, for her work to ensure veterans of all ages have access to vocational-rehab in the future.

But in the meantime, this bill will provide certainty for guardsmen and reservists who need this fix now.

I appreciate your attention today, and hope you will support this legislation, and yield the remainder of my time.

Thank you.