



**STATEMENT OF
STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA**

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

**HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:
PENDING LEGISLATION**

June 12, 2024

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Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America (SVA) to submit a statement for the record on the legislation pending before you today.

With a mission focused on empowering student veterans, SVA is committed to providing an educational experience that goes beyond the classroom. Through a dedicated and expansive network of on-campus chapters across the country, SVA aims to inspire yesterday's warriors by connecting student veterans with a community of like-minded chapter leaders. Every day these passionate leaders work to provide the necessary resources, network support, and advocacy to ensure student veterans, military-connected students, their families and survivors can effectively connect, expand their skills, and ultimately achieve their greatest potential.

SVA thanks the Subcommittee for considering several pieces of legislation that would impact student veterans and other military-affiliated students in higher education.

H.R. 7543, the Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2024

For many years, SVA has advocated for improvements to the GI Bill to ensure that all veterans, including members of the National Guard and Reserves, receive equitable education benefits. This includes addressing disparities in benefits for those on active duty versus those serving in Guard and Reserve components.

The National Guard and Reserve members are vital in our nation's defense. They often serve alongside active-duty servicemembers and are subject to the same risks and sacrifices. Many National Guard and Reserve members are deployed to combat zones or participate in other high-risk missions, like their active-duty counterparts. Therefore, denying them equitable education benefits not only undermines the principle of equity for those who serve our country, but also denies the transformative power of higher education to those who have signed up to sacrifice their time, careers, and lives in service to our nation. Members of the National Guard and Reserve do not have the luxury of having a predictable schedule or access to on-base resources. They have to balance their military obligations, sometimes demanding months of deployment for both foreign and domestic needs, with civilian careers, personal businesses, family, and other responsibilities, presenting different challenges for them to focus on the necessary activities of being a student.

SVA strongly supports this crucial legislation which addresses a longstanding disparity in educational benefits for members of the National Guard and Reserve components of the U.S. Military. SVA chapter members include these students, and their challenges related to military service, to include financial access to education, should not be neglected, simply because of the manner of their command. Ultimately, it honors the commitment of these servicemembers by affording them the opportunity to pursue higher education and achieve their ultimate career goals. Providing equitable educational benefits can ease the financial strains of pursuing higher education, enabling National Guard and Reserve members to better manage both their military service and academic ambitions.

SVA thanks Ranking Member Levin for his tireless work to make every day in uniform count the same for everyone who wears it.

H.R. 8514, To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for an annual increase in stipend for books, supplies, equipment, and other educational costs under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of Department of Veterans Affairs

Earning a college degree is costly. Not only has tuition ballooned outside of the reach of most Americans, but their remaining funds, if any, are consumed by other related expenses. Many expenses like books, supplies and equipment, need to be considered in addition to tuition. The cost of textbooks alone rose at approximately three

times the rate of inflation, and their costs double every eleven years.¹ These additional financial burdens can make higher education inaccessible for many students, requiring them to seek alternative funding sources or take on substantial debt.

In the weeks leading up to today's hearing, SVA conducted a survey of our membership regarding their cost of books and equipment. We received over 300 responses across forty-one states and the District of Columbia. Of those, 231 provided information regarding their cost of books and equipment for the Fall '23 and Spring '24 semesters. Nearly 45% of respondents indicated paying over the stipend allowance of \$1,000 and of that 45%, over half of them were undergraduate students.² The SVA survey demonstrated the need to increase the Chapter 33 stipend for textbooks, materials, equipment, and other educational costs.

Textbooks are at the center of the educational experience for most in college. They guide lectures, provide source materials, and give a broader context from which students understand their lessons. Lab equipment provides opportunities to understand lessons safely through practical application and experimentation. Other items required for coursework connect students directly with the substance of their education and are critical in the success of higher education.

The passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010 afforded student veterans \$1,000 per academic year for these necessary instruments.³ SVA strongly supports the presented bill, which will amend title 38, United States Code, to provide an annual increase in stipend for books, supplies, equipment, and other educational costs under Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of Department of Veterans Affairs. This bill will adjust the annual stipend for books, supplies, equipment, and other education costs under Chapter 33 – Post 9/11 GI Bill to \$1,400 and codify an annual increase reflective of the Consumer Price Index (inflation). This much-needed provision for crucial and required educational support items has remained stagnant despite significant cost increases over the past decade, placing student veterans squarely in the middle of very tough and unfavorable decisions as to how to pay for them or to forego them.

SVA would like to thank Representative Vasquez for introducing this critical piece of legislation to correct a long-awaited update, which shall help combat the stress on veterans facing rising cost of educational materials and make it easier for them to manage their education expenses.

H.R. 8529, Warriors to Workforce Act

Given the nation's need to expand its skilled labor pool, some veterans opt to utilize their GI Bill benefits for on-the-job training (OTJ) or apprenticeship programs. Current statute dictates that veterans participating in apprenticeship and OTJ programs experience a significant decrease in their Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) once they enter the second six months of their program – from 100% to 80%.⁴ MHA then drops to 60% after the completion of the first year. The drastic reduction in MHA after the first six months and then again at the one-year mark leads some veterans to consider leaving the program.

Many of the veterans participating in these programs have financial responsibilities outside of themselves and the program, such as families, businesses, housing costs, and others, which are not alleviated in the same way every six months by the potential for income. This situation leads to veterans relying more heavily on other forms of income, such as additional employment, which forces veterans to reprioritize their financial responsibilities over their training.

¹ Hanson, Melanie. 2023. "Average Cost of College Textbooks."

² SVA, 2024, Book Stipend Exploration

³ PUBLIC LAW 111-377—JAN. 4, 2011

⁴ 38 U.S.C. § 3313(g)(3)(B) (2021).



SVA supports H.R. 8529, Warriors to Workforce Act, which seeks to increase the MHA to 90% during the second six-month period. This change, if implemented, will significantly alleviate the financial burden on veterans, ensuring they can complete their training without hardship. SVA also advocates for clear and transparent communication with the veteran at the start of the program regarding their MHA at every six-month period of the program, fostering a sense of trust and understanding.

SVA appreciates Chairman Van Orden's commitment to reducing dropout rates and supporting our veterans' success in the Post-9/11 GI Bill apprenticeship and OTJ program.

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The continued success of veterans in higher education in the Post-9/11 era is no mistake or coincidence. In our Nation's history, educated veterans have always been the best of a generation and the key to solving our most complex challenges. Today's student veterans carry this legacy forward.

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the Subcommittee Members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans, military-connected students, their families, caregivers and survivors.