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

March 11, 2025

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Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, 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, military-connected students, their families, caregivers, and survivors in higher education.

H.R. 913, the Streamlining Aviation for Eligible Veterans Act of 2025

SVA supports H.R. 916, *the Streamlining Aviation for Eligible Veterans Act of 2025*, which would allow Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) benefits to be used for non-degree flight programs.

The purpose of the VR&E program is to provide all services and assistance necessary to enable veterans with service-connected disabilities to achieve maximum independence in daily living and, to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment.[1] This piece of legislation seeks to eliminate the unnecessary barrier between a veteran and their wish to pursue a career in the field of aviation – a field that is expected to have over 31,000 openings in the next decade.[2] [3] Allowing a veteran in the VR&E program to obtain the necessary licensure or certification—without requiring a degree—would bring them one step closer to securing gainful employment and help address the critical market gap for veterans with service-connected disabilities.

SVA acknowledges the potential benefits of creating parity between VR&E and GI Bill benefits but stresses the importance of incorporating robust safeguards. Given the history of Congress imposing and revising restrictions on VA funding for flight programs, SVA emphasizes that any expansion of VR&E benefits should include protections to prevent misuse of taxpayer dollars. Additionally, the legislation should ensure VR&E remains focused on supporting disabled veterans in achieving sustainable and meaningful flight careers.[4] SVA recommends that the Subcommittee carefully examine the proposal to ensure it addresses historical concerns surrounding fraud, waste, and abuse in VA-

[1] 38 U.S.C. § 3100.

[2] Occupational Outlook Handbook: Airline and Commercial Pilots, Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/ooh/transportation-and-material-moving/airline-and-commercial-pilots.htm#tab-6.

[3] Occupational Outlook Handbook: Aircraft and Avionics Equipment Mechanics and Technicians, Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/ooh/installation-maintenance-and-repair/aircraft-and-avionics-equipment-mechanicsand-technicians.htm#tab-6.

[4] It is not clear that GI Bill flight training safeguards would necessarily extend to VR&E if the current version of this bill passed. Programs must be approved by VA to be paid for by VR&E, but GI Bill and VR&E approval is different. It is unclear whether GI Bill approval requirements for these courses, like those found in 38 U.S.C. 3034, would necessarily apply in the context of VR&E as the two benefits exist in separate chapters, and there is no language clearly incorporating the relevant GI Bill conditions into VR&E statutes or regulations. *Compare* 38 U.S.C § 3034 *with* 38 § C.F.R. 21.292. The relevant GI Bill payment restrictions would also appear to not apply to the use of VR&E benefits for vocational flight training. *See* 38 U.S.C. § 3313.

supported flight programs.

H.R. 980, the Modernizing the Veterans On-Campus Experience Act of 2025

SVA supports H.R. 980, *the Modernizing the Veterans On-Campus Experience Act of 2025*, which makes certain improvements to the provision of on-campus educational and vocational counseling by the VA by eliminating the requirement that "such counseling services shall be provided by employees of the Department who provide such services under section 3697A [of Title 38]".

The VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program plays a crucial role in providing tailored guidance and resources to student veterans and their families.[5] VSOC counselors are stationed at designated colleges and universities to assist with career counseling, benefits navigation, disability accommodations, and academic planning. Many veterans, especially those with service-connected disabilities, need additional support in adapting to the academic environment and identifying career pathways that align with their skills and aspirations. VSOC counselors help them maximize their VA education benefits, avoid predatory institutions, and secure internships or employment opportunities upon graduation. Additionally, VSOC locations often serve as hubs for veteran-specific programming, offering workshops on financial literacy, stress management, and job readiness.[6]

This legislation would expand eligibility criteria to allow professionals in related fields—including, but not limited to, benefits counselors, outreach specialists, and rehabilitation counselors—to provide these services. Increasing the availability of counselors would enhance student veterans' access to support, regardless of their location or the limitation tied to the requirement of being a VA employee. This added flexibility would help resource-constrained institutions better serve student veterans, ultimately creating a broader support network to assist them in achieving their educational and career goals.

H.R. 1423, the Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2025

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.

National Guard and Reserve members are vital in our nation's defense. Members of the National Guard and Reserve face unique challenges in accessing education benefits that often place them at a disadvantage compared to both their active-duty counterparts and student veterans who have completed their service obligation.[7] Unlike veterans who have transitioned fully into civilian life and can plan their education with relative stability, Guardsmen and Reservists must constantly balance military commitments with civilian responsibilities, including school,

[5] Tepperman, J. (2024). *From service into students: An interview with LeNaya Hezel*. George W. Bush Presidential Center. https://www.bushcenter.org/catalyst/memos-to-washington/from-service-into-students.
[6] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.). *VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC)*. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. https://www.va.gov/resources/vetsuccess-on-campus-vsoc/.
[7] Mobley, C., Lord, S. M., Main, J. B., Brawner, C. E., & Murphy, J. (2022). "Stepping Out" for Military Service: Challenges Experienced by Students Serving in the Reserves or National Guard. Journal of Veterans Studies, 8(3), pp. 222–238. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v8i3.346

employment, and family obligations.[8] One of the primary challenges they face is the unpredictability of their service obligations. Weekend drills, annual training requirements, and sudden short-term deployments can interfere with class schedules, making it difficult to maintain steady academic progress.[9] Additionally, training exercises and mobilizations often require relocation, forcing students to withdraw from courses or navigate incomplete coursework with little institutional support. Unlike active-duty personnel who may have more predictable service schedules, National Guard and Reserve members can be called to duty with little notice, leaving them scrambling to adjust their academic and financial plans.

Ensuring that National Guard and Reserve members performing the same duties as active-duty personnel receive equivalent education benefits is not just a matter of fairness—it directly improves their financial stability and overall well-being. This legislation would create parity for National Guard and Reserve members and ensure that any day in uniform will count towards their education benefits. By providing equivalent benefits, we can ensure that their commitment to serving the nation does not come at the expense of their future educational and career prospects.

Each year SVA and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) provide a cohort of eligible student veterans with the opportunity to make an impact and raise awareness of a shared policy priority of SVA and VFW. This year, the chosen legislative topic was National Guard and Reserve Parity, further illustrating SVA's commitment to this important issue.

SVA strongly supports H.R. 1423, *the Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2025*, which addresses the 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 challenges related to military service, to include financial access to education, should not be neglected, simply because of the manner of their command. Ultimately, this bill 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.

H.R. 1458, the Veterans Education and Technical Skills Opportunities Act of 2025

SVA supports H.R. 1458, *the Veterans Education and Technical Skills Opportunities Act of 2025*, which would change the approval criteria of certain independent study programs to include an institution of higher learning that is approved to participate or is participating in the student financial assistance program authorized under title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Title IV).

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides veterans who served at least 90 days on or after September 11, 2001, with benefits to help them pay for school or job training.[10] This legislation would extend Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to veterans in an online or hybrid course of study that requires regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors in a skilled trade. These courses would give student veterans more opportunities to pursue their educational goals and obtain skilled employment.

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33). VA.gov. Accessed March 10, 2025. https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-billbenefits/post-9-11/.

H.R. 1527, the Reforming Education for Veterans Act of 2025

SVA supports Section 2 of H.R. 1527, *the Reforming Education for Veterans Act of 2025*, which seeks to provide student who are called to active duty an alternative to withdrawing from a course or taking a leave of absence if they have completed at least half of the course. This legislation would allow the student to "enter into an agreement with the institution" to "complete the course." This option, in addition to the protections provided by Isakson-Roe Act and Higher Education Opportunity Act, would provide the student the flexibility needed dependent on their individual situation.[11] [12] While SVA supports this section, we believe the language could be further improved as its current iteration does not reinstate the student veterans' GI Bill benefits if they are activated while in school. This section could better reflect current guidance found in Section 484C of the Higher Education Act of 1965 for Institutional Readmission Requirements of Servicemembers and the Department of Defense Instruction, DoDI1322.25, which addresses situations where a servicemember must withdraw or take a leave of absence for military duty in a manner that best supports their academic interests. [13] [14]

SVA neither supports nor opposes Section 3 of H.R. 1527, *the Reforming Education for Veterans Act of 2025*, which limits the annual compliance survey of an "educational institution or training establishment[s] with multiple campus" to one complete survey. We encourage the Subcommittee to give this Section additional scrutiny.

Compliance surveys are just some of the many tools used to ensure that an institution complies with all applicable provisions of the laws administered by the VA. These surveys not only prevent institutional deficiencies or violations but also facilitate their identification and correction. Many student veterans and military-affiliated students rely on these reporting surveys to identify institutions that comply with the law, as the institution also receives funds from the VA. The one report limitation, as currently written, would eliminate duplicative work across an institution with multiple campuses while opening the door to bad actor institutions to hide under the guise of a well-performing institution in the same system. The circumstances and conditions located on one campus may not be the reflection of circumstances and conditions located on another.

SVA supports Section 4 of H.R. 1527, *the Reforming Education for Veterans Act of 2025*, which extends the notice deadline by the Secretary of the VA to notify an institution of any update to the VA's school certifying official (SCO) handbook. This bill ensures that institutions receive timely and adequate notice of changes, allowing SCOs to properly implement updated policies and procedures that impact student veterans. This ultimately strengthens the efficiency and effectiveness between the VA and SCO, ensuring that student veterans receive accurate, timely support in accessing their education benefits.

H.R. 1793, the Veterans Readiness and Employment Transparency Act of 2025

SVA supports H.R. 1793, *the Veterans Readiness and Employment Transparency Act of 2025*, require VA to establish a dedicated phone number within its education call center to address veteran questions about VR&E. This would aid many student veterans navigating the program as it relates to their eligibility of benefits, program approvals,

[11] Public Law 116-315, Section 1018.
[12] Public Law 110-315, Section 487.
[13] Public Law 89-329, Section 484C.
[14] Department of Defense Instruction regarding Voluntary Education Programs 1322.25, https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/132225p.pdf.

supplies and equipment approvals, and housing needs.

The VR&E program—formerly known as Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment—has continually evolved to better serve veterans and service members with service-connected disabilities. This unique program is designed to help them prepare for, secure, and sustain meaningful and suitable employment.

Even though VR&E plays a crucial role in workforce reintegration, it is plagued by inconsistencies in service delivery, often leaving veterans in precarious financial and academic situations.[15] A recent SVA survey of VR&E participants highlighted significant shortcomings, including inconsistent counselor guidance, lengthy delays in processing benefits, and inadequate financial support for students balancing education and cost-of-living expenses.[16] Additionally, over a third of veterans reported that their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) were rarely or never available by phone.[17] Delays in responses—sometimes weeks or months—led to setbacks in academic and career progress. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported meeting with their VRC within 1–3 months of entering the program.[18] However, almost 20% waited 4–6 months or longer, which correlated with a higher likelihood of dissatisfaction.[19] VRC accessibility varied widely with 38% reporting that their VRC was rarely or never available and only one-in-four reporting their VRC was always reachable.[20]

Even though the establishment of a national call center to answer general questions would be an improvement to the VR&E program by lowering its barrier-to-entry, this information could also be found online. It should be the VRCs that answers a student when they have a question about their disabilities, employment goals, and vocational rehabilitation plan.

SVA would like to emphasize their support for this legislation, as it is a step in the right direction. However, there is more to be done. The VR&E program has the potential to be a lifeline for our veterans, but its current shortcomings must be addressed to realize that potential. By prioritizing communication, training, and accessibility, we can honor the service of our veterans by ensuring their successful transition to civilian life.

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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.

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[15] Student Veterans of America. (2024, December 11). *Testimony before the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives: Examining the effectiveness of the Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program*. https://docs.house.gov/meetings/VR/VR10/20241211/117750/HHRG-118-VR10-20241211-SD003.pdf

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.