

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

WITH RESPECT TO

Pending Legislation

WASHINGTON, D.C.

March 11, 2025

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and its Auxiliary, thank you for the opportunity to provide our remarks on legislation pending before this subcommittee.

H.R. 913, Streamlining Aviation for Eligible (SAFE) Veterans Act of 2025

The VFW supports this proposal to provide parity for students seeking flight training at certain institutions through the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program. The law allows student veterans utilizing the GI Bill to attend flight training through educational programs that do not provide a degree. This proposal would allow the same permissions for veterans utilizing Chapter 31 VR&E benefits to pursue flight training at similar institutions.

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

The VFW supports this legislation that would remove the education requirement for VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) counselors. VSOC counselors provide all student veterans and service members on a college campus with support to navigate the full range of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits, and the resources to successfully complete their educational programs. VA should have the flexibility to hire more VSOC counselors to assist students on campus. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) who provide counseling and employment services specifically for students using VR&E benefits would continue to have education requirements. Because of the nature of their counseling work, we see this as appropriate. Removing the education requirement for VSOC counselors enables more people, including veterans, to apply for these important jobs.

H.R. XXXX, Automotive Support Services to Improve Safe Transportation (ASSIST) Act of 2025

The VFW supports this legislation that would clarify language in statute that defines VA automotive support services. This amendment would modernize the law and ensure veterans receive the medically necessary automotive adaptations for their specific needs.

H.R. XXXX, Veterans Education and Technical Skills (VETS) Opportunity Act of 2025

The VFW supports the intent of this proposal to require independent study programs that lead to a certificate of graduation from a course of study to include regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors. While this sounds like appropriate guardrails for independent study programs, particularly ones that are conducted completely online, we would like clarity on the intended full impact of this legislation. Input from VA could also provide useful feedback.

H.R. XXXX, Reforming Education for Veterans Act

The VFW supports portions of this legislation to make certain improvements for student veterans and the educational institutions that serve them. First, it would provide students who are called to active duty a third option in addition to withdrawing from a course or taking a leave of absence. A veteran who has completed at least half of the course would have the option of entering into an agreement with the school to complete the course. The VFW would support this added flexibility as long as it is clarified that the choice would be for the student to make, not the institution. This would ensure that the veteran could utilize the best option to fit the individual situation considering all factors including the anticipated length of the activation.

The VFW supports the provision in this proposal to require only one compliance survey from schools that have multiple locations and to extend the time to complete surveys from ten to fifteen days. This would ensure that schools have enough time to complete the surveys and reduce duplicative work.

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

The VFW appreciates the intent of this proposal and supports certain provisions to make improvements to the VR&E program. The legislation would require VA to establish a dedicated phone number within its education call center to address veteran questions about VR&E. Many of the questions that veterans have about the program pertain to eligibility for the benefit, program approvals, supplies and equipment approvals, and housing needs. VR&E eligibility is assessed after a veteran applies for the benefit and a counselor has examined the specific case, including the employment barriers experienced. A national call center would be able to provide only general information about where and how to apply for VR&E, which is easily found online. Questions about VR&E should be answered by the veteran's counselor who knows about the individual's specific disabilities, employment goals, and vocational rehabilitation plan. More resources for counselors, including additional administrative support, would enable them to spend the appropriate time on counseling. The VFW recommends focused efforts to ensure counselors can be more responsive to their veterans.

We support the provision to require that VR&E counselors attend monthly question and answer sessions with school certifying officials. VFW members who work at institutions of higher education tell us that this would be helpful. School officials want meaningful and regular interactions with counselors to ask questions. We recognize that this would add more work to the counselors' already heavy workload, so administrative support would be necessary for them to have adequate time to prepare and conduct these sessions.

The VFW supports the provision to require counselors to provide veterans in-person briefings about VR&E services, or virtually if the school is more than 150 miles from the assigned VA regional office. Student veterans tell us that they want more interaction and information from VR&E counselors, and this is a good step forward.

The VFW supports the provision to require VA to provide an annual report on the number of veterans who requested an extension of their VR&E program, the number of requests approved, and the number rejected. This would provide important oversight of the program. It could identify veterans who are not making progress and who may need their rehabilitation plans reworked. This reporting could help reduce waste and abuse of the program, safeguarding this benefit for veterans who truly need it.

H.R. XXXX, To amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs repays members of the Armed Forces for certain contributions made by such members towards Post-9/11 Educational Assistance

The VFW supports this proposal to provide individuals who paid into the Montgomery GI Bill during their military service and then use their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to receive a repayment of their contributions. For those students who qualify, this could mean \$1,200 paid back. This would provide greater financial stability to recipients while they pursue their education or training. We ask for congressional oversight regarding how this could impact those for whom the Rudisill Supreme Court decision would also apply.

H.R. XXXX, End Veteran Homelessness Act of 2025

The VFW supports this proposal to modify the joint U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and VA Supportive Housing program (VASH), or HUD-VASH program. HUD-VASH combines HUD's housing choice voucher rental assistance with VA case management and supportive services. This proposal would expand case management for homeless veterans, and provide assistance with rent and administrative fees such as security deposits. The bill would also establish an annual report on the HUD-VASH program including usage data, staffing ratios, services provided to veterans, barriers that prevented voucher use, and characteristics of voucher use. Lastly, the proposal includes a Government Accountability Office report on characteristics of homeless veterans served by the HUD-VASH program. These reports would provide important information on the success of the program and would assist in identifying where specific improvements should be made.

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

The VFW strongly supports this legislation to allow any day in uniform for which military pay is received to count toward Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility, creating parity for National Guard and Reserve members. Currently, Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility is based on active duty service for at least 90 days. For those in the reserve components, initial skills and training periods are deemed non-qualifying service. Also, full-time National Guard service and certain responses to national emergencies do not qualify.

The sacrifices of these reserve component members have continued to be overlooked for decades despite an increase in deployments since September 11, 2001. Though they have served alongside active duty service members during increasingly frequent activations both domestic and abroad, they do not always earn their VA education benefits at the same rate. This inequity has been highlighted during the frequent activations due to natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, and border security missions as National Guard and Reserve members have stood on the front lines administering relief and services. The VFW strongly urges Congress to pass this legislation to allow reserve component members to rightfully earn GI Bill benefits for every day served.

H.R. XXXX, To amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the conditions under which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is required to redevelop the individualized vocational rehabilitation plan for a veteran, and for other purposes

The VFW supports this proposal to modify the conditions under which VA is required to redevelop a veteran's individualized vocational rehabilitation plan. Veterans using VR&E benefits may experience challenges with service-connected disabilities while pursuing education or training as part of their approved plan. This legislation would require VA to review the rehabilitation plan annually with the veteran and together redevelop the plan if it is no longer feasible due to the veteran's employment challenges or if the goals are assessed to be more feasible under a different plan. Some of this guidance can be found in regulation, but this would codify these provisions into law and add the annual review. Veterans using VR&E benefits should be able to redevelop their rehabilitation plans at any point in the process, if and when needed, to ensure successful employment outcomes upon completion.

H.R. XXXX, Fair Access to Co-ops for Veterans Act of 2025

The VFW supports this draft proposal to extend the VA Home Loan Guaranty program to veterans seeking to purchase residential cooperative housing units (co-ops). Since the program does not currently include co-ops, veterans who live in cities where these housing options are prevalent are disproportionately affected. New York City is the prime example. In that city alone, co-ops comprise almost two thirds of all multi-family housing, for which veterans cannot use VA home loans. Veteran home ownership in New York City is significantly lower than the rest of the country, which is concerning. Other cities where co-ops are prevalent are Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, Newark, Palm Beach, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Expanding the VA home loan program to co-ops would help fix an equity issue for veterans who live in these areas, and provide long-term housing stability.

Chairman Van Orden and Ranking Member Pappas, this concludes my testimony. I am prepared to answer any questions you or the subcommittee members may have.

Information Required by Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the VFW has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2025, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.

The VFW has not received payments or contracts from any foreign governments in the current year or preceding two calendar years.