

STATEMENT OF
DR. JOSEPH W. WESCOTT
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE LIAISON
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE APPROVING AGENCIES

FOR THE RECORD

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

WITH RESPECT TO

Pending Legislation

June 15, 2025

Introduction

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas and members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, on behalf of the fifty-three-member State agencies of the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) and their over 220 staff members, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on legislation pertaining to veterans' education and training.

H.R. 1965 – “Veterans Education Assistance Adjustment Act”

This bill would increase the book stipend from \$1,000 to \$1,400 for veterans using Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits and would provide for annual increases for the stipend tied to the Consumer Price Index. The cost of books has risen dramatically since the book stipend was established in 2009, when the Post-9/11 GI Bill was signed. NASAA sees this as a needed and important improvement to the GI Bill.

NASAA supports this bill.

H.R. 3387- “Enhancing the Transitioning Servicemember’s Experience (ETS) Act”

This bill seeks to strengthen the Transition Assistance Program, something which is sorely needed. It does so by requiring minimum periods for counseling, allows repeat attendance by separating service members when space is available and makes separating service members

eligible up to 540 days prior to separation. The bill also provides professional financial counseling, establishes a pilot program for military spouses, extends transitional health care coverage from 180 to 270 days, and standardizes the TAP pathways across all services. It also requires improved coordination and information sharing between the Departments of Defense (DOD), Veterans Affairs, and Labor, along with annual reporting and audits of TAP delivery. Finally, it wisely creates a searchable VA website for recently separated veterans to find local support within the states, facilitating a smoother handoff to state agencies to ensure a more successful transition to civilian life. NASAA applauds the meaningful enhancement and comprehensive nature of this legislation.

NASAA strongly supports this bill.

Discussion Draft – “Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act”

This bill would increase the monthly housing stipend for students in approved online programs of study approved by State Approving Agencies (SAA) to the full national average rate. Currently, students enrolled in distance learning programs receive a housing stipend rate that is equal to half the national average.

Veterans are often non-traditional students, many of whom need to work full or part-time jobs to support their families while attending higher education institutions. Recent studies have suggested that many veterans seek out programs that offer online or hybrid options due to the greater flexibility they offer. Furthermore, some have service-connected disabilities that make online learning their most viable option for pursuing higher education. As the gatekeepers of quality, State Approving Agencies have long had concerns about online education and training in certain disciplines, but we also recognize the far-reaching innovations and improvements which have taken place in the sphere of online education over the past decade, some as a result of the COVID crisis. Finally, one of the early arguments against the full housing stipend was that online students were not using residence halls and/or on-campus facilities, which meant they did not need the full housing stipend as they were likely living at home or somewhere without additional housing costs. Almost two decades later we know this is generally not the case and the law needs to reflect present day circumstances and recognize that most online student veterans also are paying rent and living expenses. Likewise, NASAA appreciates the argument that the national average may be higher than the full-time stipend in some cases, resulting in some online students receiving a higher living stipend than some residential students. This could be addressed by changing the language to read that students would receive the higher of either the national average OR the full-time resident rate at the school. Regardless, we no longer believe it is appropriate to penalize veterans who choose and can benefit from approved educational programs delivered online. Especially considering that for some veterans and their families, this may be their best and most reasonable way to achieve their higher education goal.

Finally, with increased oversight from the State Approving Agency, as provided in the risk-based survey model and supervisory visits, we feel that we can ensure that bad actors do not take advantage of veterans. To ensure this remains the case, we ask that Congress insist that the VA

work closely with State Approving Agencies so that risk-based surveys (RBS) are conducted efficiently and effectively as was the case in the original RBS model developed by NASAA.

NASAA supports this bill.

HR 2954 – “Veterans’ Transition to Trucking Act of 2025”

This bill permits the VA to act in the role of the State Approving Agency to approve multi-State apprenticeship programs and “for other purposes.” As written, it would place the approval of truck driver training programs/apprenticeships solely in the hands of the Department of Veterans Affairs and as such, removes the critical authority and action from the States and their approval experts, the State Approving Agencies. This legislation, while seemingly well meaning, causes NASAA great concern in its present form. As drafted, this bill sweeps away vital protections provided to veterans in the important federal partnership requiring state approval of education and training programs for veterans. Given that the VALOR Act is already law and provides for the approval of multi-state apprenticeships, we fail to see a compelling need for this legislation. With current challenges to proper approval and oversight, as well as the need to further strengthen SAA approval requirements and improve timely communication with the VA, we maintain that we should not remove the important responsibility of approval and oversight from State Approving Agencies.

NASAA strongly opposes this bill in its present form.

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

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

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