

STATEMENT OF
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VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

FOR THE RECORD

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

WITH RESPECT TO

Pending Legislation

Washington, D.C.

June 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. 2334, To amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to preempt any squatter's rights established by State law regarding real property owned by a member of the uniformed services

The VFW supports this legislation to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) to preempt state laws granting squatter's rights to individuals occupying property owned by a service member during periods of active service. This bill addresses an emerging concern for service members who may be unable to monitor or defend their property due to deployments or other service-related obligations. By clarifying that such state-level protections for squatters do not apply in these cases, this legislation would provide additional peace of mind and help preserve property rights for persons who are serving our country. The VFW sees this as a practical and necessary enhancement to existing SCRA protections.

H.R. 3386, Streamlining the Solid Start Communications Act

The VFW supports this legislation to enhance the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Solid Start Program. It is a top VFW legislative priority to ensure transitioning service members are made aware through multiple avenues of the VA benefits they have earned, including during the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and in communications with accredited representatives as part of the VA Benefits Delivery at Discharge program. VFW survey data indicate that VA outreach efforts can be improved to better inform veterans about benefits that can be lifesaving and to ensure a successful transition to civilian life. Solid Start was established for VA to

conduct outreach to recently separated members of the armed forces during their first year after the military. It involved VA staff making three phone calls to veterans to inform them of the benefits and services to which they may be entitled, to answer questions about benefits, and provide additional resources and information as needed.

This legislation would address how VA would conduct further outreach if veterans could not be reached by phone. Currently, the law indicates that VA should follow up with “tailored mailings to ensure the veteran still receives similar information.” This proposal would expand that directive to include not only tailored mailings, but also other forms of communication including text messaging, virtual chatting, and other electronic messaging options. The VFW agrees that every effort should be made by VA to reach veterans using modern modes of communication, especially during their first year after military service.

H.R. 3387, Enhancing the Transitioning Servicemember’s Experience (ETS) Act

The VFW strongly supports this legislation to strengthen the Transition Assistance Program by expanding eligibility to 540 days prior to separation, requiring minimum durations for counseling, and allowing repeat attendance on a space-available basis. The bill also includes a pilot program for military spouses, mandates individualized financial counseling by qualified professionals, standardizes TAP pathways across all service components, and extends transitional health care coverage from 180 to 270 days.

It also promotes a more seamless and supportive transition by requiring improved coordination and information sharing between the Departments of Defense (DOD), Veterans Affairs, and Labor, along with annual reporting and audits of TAP delivery. It would also create a searchable VA website for recently separated veterans to locate local support. Since veterans receive their benefits and services primarily through VA, we find it to be the most appropriate entity to host a website for local resources. Improving transition programs is one of the VFW’s top priorities, and we see this proposal as directly supporting the intent of the current DOD and VA memorandum of understanding to enhance coordination between the two departments on these efforts. The VFW appreciates the comprehensive nature of this proposal and encourages the committee to swiftly advance it.

H.R. 3481, Delivering Digitally to Our Veterans Act of 2025

The VFW supports this legislation to require VA to provide a mechanism for veterans to correspond electronically with VA staff to ask questions about entitlement to and use of educational assistance programs. Veterans would be able to opt to receive these communications electronically instead of by regular mail. Additionally, those already enrolled in educational programs would be notified of this option. The VFW sees this as a positive step toward providing modern ways to communicate with VA and receive the answers to pressing questions about benefits and services. The VFW recommends implementing this option even beyond VA education benefits.

H.R. 3579, Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act

The VFW supports the intent of this legislation to make certain improvements to Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E). The VFW is neutral on the provision to require veterans to apply for VR&E services before receiving an evaluation by a counselor. If this creates a timelier process, then this would be a positive change. However, the VFW wants to ensure that veterans are able to reach out to VA with questions about VR&E eligibility and receive an explanation of the application process. Veterans should be able to speak with VA staff about this benefit and understand if it is a potential option for them.

The VFW does not support reducing employment assistance counseling from 18 to 12 months for veterans who have completed VR&E programs. When veterans complete their rehabilitation programs, they may struggle to find employment on their own. Employment counseling is an important resource for veterans with service-connected disabilities who are trying to reenter the workforce. Reducing this timeframe may hinder some veterans from successfully finding long-term employment.

The VFW supports the provisions that require VA to report on employment outcomes of VR&E participants, including wages earned, and to annually make public the average wait times between the date when a veteran requests a VR&E program and the date on which the veteran first meets with a counselor. This reporting would provide valuable information on the effectiveness and timeliness of the program. The VFW also supports the provision for an external body to review the program and provide recommendations on potential improvements. We look forward to working with the subcommittee to discuss this proposal further and to pass important reforms for the VR&E program.

Discussion Draft, Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act

The VFW supports this legislation to increase the monthly housing stipend for students in approved online courses of study. Currently, students in distance learning programs receive a housing stipend rate that is half the national average. This legislation would raise that amount to the full national average rate.

The reality is that many veterans are nontraditional students. Some have spouses and dependents to support. Some work one or more jobs while pursuing their education. Some left the military with service-connected injuries or illnesses that create barriers to attending school fully in person. All these factors have an impact on veterans' lives and their ability to use their education benefits. Online programs may be the best fit for certain veterans. Some may participate in in-person courses for part of their education or training, but then shift for a semester or during the summer months to distance learning courses. It is critical that veterans have stable housing while they use their earned education benefits to be successful in completing the programs and ensure the well-being of their families. As education evolves with new technologies, veteran benefits must also evolve to be fully utilized.

Discussion Draft, To amend title 38, United States Code, to limit the amount of time the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs may extend the period of a vocational rehabilitation program for a veteran

The VFW does not support limiting vocational rehabilitation extensions to an arbitrary 96 months. The VR&E program provides individualized rehabilitation plans for disabled veterans. Each plan is unique and tailored to the specific needs of each veteran. If an extension is required for a veteran to complete the program, particularly if a service-connected disability worsens, the period of the extension should be an appropriate amount of time for the veteran to achieve the employment goals. Additionally, if a veteran requires an extension, VA should also assess whether the rehabilitation plan should continue unchanged with an extension, or be reevaluated and modified.

H.R. 1965, Veterans Education Assistance Adjustment Act

The VFW supports this legislation to increase the book stipend from \$1,000 to \$1,400 for veterans using Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits. It would also include annual increases for the stipend based on the Consumer Price Index. The \$1,000 book stipend has not been increased since 2009 when the Post-9/11 GI Bill was passed into law, even though the cost of books and supplies for higher education has increased. The VFW sees this as a commonsense improvement to this education benefit.

H.R. 2720, Gold Star Family Education Parity Act

As a resolutions-based organization, the VFW does not currently have a position on ending the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance program in favor of another education benefit for survivors. Accordingly, we do not have an opinion on this legislation at this time. While the VFW would like to see education benefits for survivors continue to be strengthened and improved, we caution against inadvertently creating a benefits package for survivors that is more generous than similar benefits to which veterans are entitled due to their service.

Discussion Draft, Every Veteran Housed Act

The VFW supports this legislation to expand veteran homeless programs to more veterans facing housing instability. This proposal would broaden the eligibility for veterans who served for any length of time in the military, discharged under certain conditions. It would also include expanded eligibility for those currently serving. Stable housing is a key contributor to physical and mental well-being and can lower risks for suicide. Programs aimed at preventing veteran homelessness should be available to all veterans who need them.

Chairman Van Orden and Ranking Member Pappas, this concludes my statement. Again, thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments on these issues.

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.