

## Executive Summary

The 2025 Government Shutdown has had a profound and immediate impact on student veterans, dependents, and active-duty personnel relying on VA education benefits. A mixed-methods analysis conducted by the National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators (NAVPA) reveals systemic vulnerabilities that disrupted financial stability, academic progress, and mental health for thousands of beneficiaries.

## Key Findings

- **Widespread Payment Delays:** Nearly **46.9% of students** using GI Bill® benefits did not receive their October payment, leaving many unable to afford rent, tuition, and basic living expenses.
- **Enrollment Impact:** Approximately **30.5% of respondents reported negative effects on enrollment**, with some withdrawing or delaying classes due to lack of funding.
- **Most Affected Groups:** Chapter 35 (Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance), Chapter 33 (Post-9/11 GI Bill®), and Chapter 31 (Veteran Readiness & Employment) recipients experienced the greatest disruption.
- **Communication Breakdown:** Closure of VA Education Call Centers and furlough of VR&E counselors eliminated critical support channels, preventing students from verifying enrollment, requesting hardship assistance, or resolving benefit issues.
- **Emotional and Academic Strain:** Students reported high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, compounded by financial hardship and uncertainty. Many resorted to loans, credit cards, or additional jobs, risking academic failure.

## Systemic Issues Identified

- Delays in benefit processing due to technology updates and furloughed staff.
- Lack of transparency and insufficient contingency planning during shutdowns.
- IT failures and backlog exacerbating payment delays.

## NAVPA Recommendations

- **Immediate Actions:** Reopen VA Education Call Centers and classify VR&E counselors as essential personnel to ensure uninterrupted support.
- **Policy Safeguards:** Implement legislative measures to protect veteran benefits during future shutdowns.
- **Operational Improvements:** Schedule technology updates outside peak academic periods and enhance communication protocols for benefit status and hardship assistance.

The findings underscore an urgent need for reform to safeguard educational benefits for those who have served. Without decisive action, future disruptions will continue to jeopardize the academic success and well-being of student veterans and their families.