



**STATEMENT OF  
STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION  
AND THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:**

***“Digital G.I. Bill Undelivered: Contracting Challenges and the  
Need for Acquisition Reform”***

**February 4, 2026**



Chairman Barrett and Van Orden, Ranking Member Budzinski and Pappas, and Members of the Subcommittees: Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America (SVA) to submit a statement for the record on this important hearing titled “*Digital G.I. Bill Undelivered: Contracting Challenges and the Need for Acquisition Reform*” 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, caregivers, and survivors can effectively connect, expand their skills, and ultimately achieve their greatest potential.

SVA thanks the Subcommittees for considering this issue that would impact student veterans, military-connected students, their families, caregivers, and survivors in higher education.

### **Introduction**

In 2026, the GI Bill remains one of the most powerful tools for veteran success, offering pathways to higher education, economic mobility, and long-term well-being. For many transitioning service members, the GI Bill serves as their first interaction with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), making it a defining moment that shapes their trust in the whole of VA. A smooth, transparent experience encourages veterans to explore the full range of VA services, from mental health care to career resources, while systemic hurdles discourage engagement. If fully optimized, the GI Bill can serve as the “front door” to VA, ensuring that veterans not only achieve the economic mobility promised by their service and education but also remain engaged in the broader network of programs designed to support them throughout their lives. The past several years have seen significant advancements in the administration of the GI Bill, including investments in information technology modernization, automation of benefit processing, and customer service reform within the Veterans Benefits Administration have reduced delays and improved reliability.<sup>1</sup> These improvements are significant precisely because they reduce visibility, in that education benefits are most effective when they recede into dependability rather than demand constant management by the beneficiary. Such gains, however, are not self-sustaining. They require continued oversight to ensure that modernization efforts remain responsive to veteran experience rather than driven solely by system efficiency. A direct example of this oversight happened on December 16, 2025, when the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity had a hearing titled “*Detrimental Delays: Reviewing Payment Failures in VA’s Education Programs.*” This hearing explored the impact that the interruption of federal funding had on our beneficiaries utilizing their Chapter 31 Veteran Readiness and Employment or Chapter 35 Survivors and Dependents educational benefits starting on October 1, 2025. Chapter 35 beneficiaries throughout the nation started off their Fall 2025 semester without

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.). *Transforming the GI Bill experience*. Digital VA. Retrieved February 19, 2025, from <https://digital.va.gov/delightful-end-user-experience/transforming-the-gi-bill-experience/>.

receiving their Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) due to various technological issues. These students turned to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Education Service for help through their counselors or through the GI Bill Hotline. GI Bill users were unwillingly placed into a state of uncertainty after having to rely heavily on these critical operations to stay enrolled and housed.

## **GI Bill Hotline**

As of February 2024, nearly 840,000 students were receiving some GI Bill benefits, with almost 600,000 of them enrolled at campuses with an SVA chapter.<sup>2,3</sup> The GI Bill Hotline (GIBH) is the only place where a student can speak with a live representative about any question they have regarding their GI Bill education benefits. The GIBH is open Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET by dialing 888-GIBILL-1 (888-442-4551).<sup>4</sup> By calling that hotline, a student can speak with a VA representative, knowledgeable in education benefits, to verify payments, fix billing errors, and get real-time benefit guidance when they are unable otherwise. When the interruptions of federal funding forced the GIBH to close on October 1, 2025, it had potentially left roughly 840,000 students using VA education benefits with nowhere to turn when their monthly benefits were delayed – risking eviction, dis-enrollment, or withdrawal. Students utilizing Chapter 31 Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) were impacted even further to the hotline closing when all Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) were also furloughed on October 3, 2025.<sup>5</sup> Direct communication with VA on education benefits came to a halt, leaving AskVA.gov as the sole channel. Responses were significantly delayed and often failed to provide useful or actionable information.

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors**

The VR&E program 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 to obtain economic mobility post-service. VRCs are responsible for approving academic plans, authorizing reimbursement stipends for educational supplies, and guiding employment readiness.

In December 2024, SVA testified on the crucial role that VR&E plays in workforce reintegration and how its inconsistencies in service delivery have often left veterans in precarious financial and academic situations.<sup>6</sup> SVA

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<sup>2</sup> According to the VBA Annual Benefits Report Fiscal Year 2023, updated February 2024, there were 843,135 recipients combined of the Post-9/11 GI Bill (chapter 33), MGIB-AD (chapter 30), MGIB-SR (1606), DEA (chapter 35), and VEAP (chapter 32).

<sup>3</sup> The number of those receiving GI Bill benefits reported by campus in the VA's GI Bill Comparison Tool dataset were cross-referenced with campuses present in the SVA system of record as having an SVA chapter.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefit Administration Education and Training Contact Us, [https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/contact\\_us.asp](https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/contact_us.asp).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Human Capital Contingency Plan*, last updated Oct. 3, 2025, <https://department.va.gov/contingency-planning/human-capital-contingency-plan/#table-3-va-functions-to-be-suspended-by-administration-or-staff-office>.

<sup>6</sup> Student Veterans of America, *EXAMINING the EFFECTIVENESS of the VETERANS READINESS and EMPLOYMENT (VR&E) PROGRAM*, December 11, 2025. <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/VR/VR10/20241211/117750/HHRG-118-VR10-20241211-SD003.pdf>.

conducted a survey of its members about their experiences with the VR&E program,<sup>7</sup> and a majority of respondents said they would recommend the program to other service-connected disabled veterans seeking to prepare for, find, and maintain employment.<sup>8</sup> However, the most significant barrier identified was communication, nearly one-third reported they could rarely reach their VRC, and three-in-four had inconsistent access.<sup>9</sup> These gaps have led to delayed approvals, interrupted stipends, and stalled economic growth and career progress.<sup>10</sup> What was once already a strained system had reached a standstill amidst the lapse in federal funding, and was further exacerbated by the closing of the GIBH. This left many disabled student veterans uncertain about their ability to continue their training, secure meaningful employment, and provide for their families.

### **Chapter 35 Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) Beneficiaries**

GI Bill beneficiaries utilizing their Chapter 35 VA Educational Benefits include children and spouses of veterans or service members who have died, been captured or are missing, or are totally disabled from a service-connected disability.<sup>11</sup> The payments help eligible students pay for school or cover expenses while training for a job. Full-time students enrolled in this program receive nearly \$1,600 each month from VA. SVA, as well as many other veteran and military serving organizations, has heard an increasing number of issues among membership on VA system failures that have compounded in light of the funding pause causing nationwide delays in education payments for dependents and survivors relying on Chapter 35 benefits.<sup>12</sup>

One family reached out to SVA about their communications via the GIBH throughout the month of September with the goal of resolving their issue before their daughter started their term in November. VA instructed the family to continuously check in using the GIBH throughout the following weeks of October. However, their calls went unanswered once the GIBH halted, resulting in impact to the dependent's enrollment. It is without question that these delays have created real financial strain and uncertainty; many are now struggling to cover basic living expenses such as rent, utilities, and transportation. Others are facing the difficult prospect of taking on additional debt or withdrawing from classes to avoid falling further behind financially.

### **Recommendations**

With the GIBH closed and VRC furloughed, students had no direct path to resolve payment issues or confirm their benefit status. This led to uncertainty, financial strain, and the risk of dis-enrollment or withdrawal of students across the country. Even while these services were suspended, campuses remained open, classes continued, and student veterans pressed forward in pursuit of their education and career goals. Below are several recommendations from SVA to improve processes and prevent similar disruptions in the future.

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<sup>7</sup> Student Veterans of America, 2024 VR&E Exploration Survey.

<sup>8</sup> Id.

<sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance*, last updated Aug. 4, 2025, <https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/education-and-careers/dependents-education-assistance/>.

<sup>12</sup> Linda Hersey, *Computer 'glitch' delays higher-ed payments for veterans' dependents and survivors*, Oct. 15, 2025, <https://www.stripes.com/veterans/2025-10-16/veterans-gi-bill-payments-shutdown-19448904.html>.

First, it is imperative that VA designate all VRC roles and at least a portion of staffing for the GI Bill Hotline as “essential service” providers and protect these services from future funding interruptions. This would ensure that students retain access to support services and do not go without the education benefits they earned or that were earned for them. Second, SVA urges VA to provide timely communications in a transparent and plain manner to students, schools, Congress, and veteran/military serving organizations when the risk of payment delays are known in advance. Lastly, SVA recommends VA adopt an IT rollout plan that avoids the start of a new academic term and add/drop class period. Although not every school’s calendar is aligned, there are times throughout the year that are high-traffic in terms of enrollment, graduation, etc., and VA should understand when these periods fall throughout the year. The beginning of a term poses the highest risk to students if that system does malfunction. The add/drop period are when school certifying officials can confirm a students’ course enrollment for the term. Implementing changes at a different time would allow VA to fully test and stabilize its systems before they are implemented to the larger user base.

These recommendations will ensure that students will continue to get their benefits in a timely manner and have a trusted VA resource to assist them when they are in a significant time of need. It would additionally build trust for VA service users and ensure that the “front door” is not a barrier to entry. Transparency and accountability must be held to the highest standard when the livelihood of student veterans, military-connected students, family members, caregivers, and survivors are at risk. Modern technology can be used to make VA benefits easier, faster, and more reliable to access and process. If these upgrades are implemented properly, student veterans can focus on their education and career goals rather than spending time navigating a broken, outdated system.

SVA welcomes any communication with VA to assist in disseminating timely information to students when an issue arises. Additionally, SVA would request that the GI Bill Stakeholder meetings return to their regular cadence. These meetings have historically been a valuable and effective forum for veteran- and military-serving organization engagement and an important tool for highlighting educational benefit issues early.

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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 America’s most complex challenges. Today’s student veterans carry this legacy forward.

We thank the Chairmen, Ranking Members, and the Members of the Subcommittees for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans, military-connected students, their families, caregivers and survivors.