



**WRITTEN STATEMENT
SUBMITTED TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION
AND SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
119TH CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION**

February 4, 2026

Chairmen Barrett and Van Orden, Ranking Members Budzinski and Pappas, and Members of the Subcommittees:

We thank you for the opportunity to present this statement for consideration at this hearing, which includes a review of critical failures in the delivery of higher education and veterans' education benefits. Veterans Education Success is a nonprofit organization with the mission of advancing higher education success for veterans, service members, and military families, and protecting the integrity and promise of the GI Bill and other federal education programs.

In this statement, we address this timely and important hearing topic, "Digital GI Bill Undelivered: Contracting Challenges and the Need for Acquisition Reform."

The Digital GI Bill (DGIB) was intended to modernize how VA administers education benefits by replacing aging enrollment and payment systems with a comprehensive digital platform. However, the DGIB transformation did not emerge in a vacuum. The platform has been rolled out in stages amid repeated GI Bill technology failures. These failures repeatedly demonstrated the same underlying risks: insufficient testing, poor timing, fragmented accountability, and inadequate contingency planning. Despite those lessons, VA has continued to proceed with DGIB updates that directly affected payment processing without ensuring the systems were ready or that safeguards were in place to prevent additional fiascos.

Contract failures, digital modernization missteps, and payment delays persist as core problems in the administration of education benefits at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). Below, we highlight the key hurdles VBA faces in continuing the DGIB transformation rollout. We then offer solutions to each of these issues, informed by our work directly with student veterans and schools grappling with the downstream effects of these challenges.

We thank the Subcommittees for their continued attention to and oversight of these critical issues, having seen firsthand the real cost of delays and the direct impact on students. As you know, the GI Bill is an earned benefit, and veterans, their families, and survivors should be able to rely on it without the added stress of uncertainty about continuing their education or, worse, maintaining reliable housing. As always, we welcome feedback on the discussion points below and look forward to engaging with your staff members on these issues.

From the very beginning of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) experienced delays in GI Bill distribution and was forced to issue emergency payments of up to \$3,000 to more than 25,000 veterans who were left without their funds.¹ The following year, delayed payments persisted, and nearly 50,000 veterans continued to experience difficulties with VA's failures.^{2, 3}

More recently, while implementing the Forever GI Bill, VA experienced major IT failures in the fall of 2018.⁴ Housing payments for as many as 180,000 student veterans were delayed due to computer system updates and processing issues.⁵

A separate—but all too familiar—breakdown occurred in 2023 under the Biden Administration: VA's rollout of the digital enrollment system reportedly triggered an unexpected gap in housing payments.⁶ We testified that "VBA publicly announced a technical flaw that resulted in more than 280,000 student veterans' being delayed on their monthly housing allowance (MHA) GI Bill payments. For nearly 4,000 of these veterans, VBA had to work with the U.S. Department of the Treasury (USDT) to mail hard-copy checks to the individuals to ensure continuity of on-time payments."⁷

- **Problem:** VA's education benefit systems continue to experience recurring payment failures, destabilizing GI Bill students' lives.
- **Solution:** Congress should require VA to implement reliable technical safeguards, transparent timelines, and actionable contingency plans because delays should be anticipated.

The recurring theme of "technical glitches" (and the newer theme of "contract failures") that inevitably leaves thousands of GI Bill students missing their education benefits is simply unacceptable. While VA always has an excuse for the error, the impact of these debacles falls on veterans and their families, who are forced to shoulder the burden of VA's repeated failures.

- **Problem:** VA's repeated characterization of major payment disruptions as isolated "technical challenges" and "contract failures" hides systemic weaknesses in planning and delivery of benefits.

¹ Philpott, Tom. "VA, lawmakers share blame for GI Bill delay," *Stars and Stripes*, (Oct. 17, 2009), <https://www.stripes.com/news/2009-10-17/military-update-va-lawmakers-share-blame-for-gi-bill-delay-1991955.html>.

² Daniel, Lisa. "VA Seeks to Eliminate Claims Processing Backlog, Official Says," *Army.mil*, (Dec. 18, 2010), https://www.army.mil/article/49646/va_seeks_to_eliminate_claims_processing_backlog_official_says.

³ Scholarships.com. "GI Bill Backlog Continues into Spring," *Scholarships.com Blog*, (Jan. 8, 2010), <https://www.scholarships.com/blog/gi-bill-backlog-continues-into-spring>.

⁴ Veterans of Foreign Wars. "Delayed Housing Payments Impacting 180,000 Student Veterans," *VFW Archives*, (Oct. 2018), <https://www.vfw.org/media-and-events/latest-releases/archives/2018/10/delayed-housing-payments-impacting-180000-student-veterans>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Garcia, Joseph. "Update on Post 9/11 GI Bill MHA Delayed Payment for March 2023," *Veterans Benefits Administration*, (Apr. 19, 2023), <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USVAVBA/bulletins/355e1e1>.

⁷ Veterans Education Success. "Statement for the Record Submitted to the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs 118th Congress, First Session," (Apr. 26, 2023), <https://vetsedsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Veterans-Education-Success-Statement-For-the-Record-SVAC-4-26-2023.pdf>.

- **Solution:** VA must adopt more rigorous testing of technology solutions and independent verification of efficacy. VA should also implement staged technology rollouts that prevent failures from reaching students in the first place.

Continuing the trend of IT failures and poor communication, VA once again left students scrambling this fall. These benefits are fundamental to whether a student can remain enrolled, maintain housing stability, and cover the daily costs of attendance. When those funds disappear, the consequences are immediate and personal, as we saw over the course of this fall semester.

One student veteran wrote to us to describe the difficult position she faced as a result of the delays:

I have not received one of my payments and it's almost 90 days. I had my vehicle repossessed last week and I am facing eviction with late fees that are mounting[.] I am attending out of state school and I have no family near me. I am in dire need of assistance please help me. I can't get any answers from the emails I sent and the phone calls that go unanswered. I checked the VA benefits website and it shows that my benefits are eligible, but they have not issued any payments. This goes back to August. This is affecting my life tremendously.

Dylan, who served as a Boatswain's Mate in the US Navy for five years and now attends Simpson University, shared:

Beginning of fall semester 2025 my pay for school was delayed for two months, during that time I tried to check in the the VA hotline (it was shutdown and in furrow) I got redirected each time and every person that answered the phone either has no access to my info, or didn't know how to help, I called local congress representatives, I even went to navy federal for hardship loans and it was denied due to me not being a federal employee. Being in school put me in a weird circumstance where I relied on that money but don't meet requirements for help; if it wasn't for my loving fiancée and my job I would have been evicted and dropped out of school.

What made this situation more damaging was not simply the payment disruption, but the utter lack of communication. This is fundamentally a leadership failure, not merely a contractual error. VA was aware in August about the risk of payment delays.⁸ VA later described the payment failure as being the result of a technical malfunction of their IT rollout.⁹

Once students became aware of missing payments, no one could get answers because the GI Bill hotline was classified as non-essential during the federal government shutdown—an issue we hope the Committee will address by requiring VA to deem the hotline an essential service. Yet, in the intervening months, no steps were taken to inform GI Bill students and stakeholders of the impending challenges.

⁸ Krupnick, Matt. "Complete nightmare': Student veterans, advisers say VA cuts are derailing their educations," *The Hechinger Report*, (Aug. 12, 2025), <https://hechingerreport.org/complete-nightmare-student-veterans-advisers-say-va-cuts-are-derailing-their-educations/>.

⁹ See note 8.

Adding to this perspective, Joshua Rider, the Executive Director of the Center for Adult and Veteran Services at Kent State University, had this to share:

I have served in a leadership capacity in the area of military-connected student benefits for 16 years and have been a School Certifying Official for 20 years. The recent debacle involving Chapter 35 benefits had the largest negative impact I have witnessed since the rollout of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009-10 and the initial issues with paper checks. I would like to open by saying that this is an extremely vulnerable population, as they are the dependents and spouses of 100% Permanent/Totally disabled veterans.

Kent State is just one of 37 publicly funded institutions in the state of Ohio. In the Fall 2025 term, we certified 297 Chapter 35 students. Of that number 50% were affected by the technical and processing errors. This means that 148 students were without \$1,536 per month until December. That's \$6,144 per student or \$909,312 for the population. Those funds are used for both on and off-campus room and board. We worked with our students living in campus housing to ensure there were no issues with their food or housing. However, 40% of those affected students live off campus. For those 59 students, landlords and grocery stores are unwilling to assist with a \$6,144 payment delay.

In summary, these are vulnerable students who were stripped of entitled funds upon which they and their families depend to fund their most basic needs: food, shelter, and heat. Kent State is just one example. If you multiply that number by 37, the regional impact is immense.

- **Problem:** Students, families, institutions, advocates, and Congress have repeatedly been left uninformed about major impending issues, even when VA has known about the risk of payment delays before they occur.
- **Solution:** VA should be required to provide proactive, plain-language notifications to students, schools, and oversight entities whenever payment risks are identified.

Congressional staff contacted organizations like ours to verify reports that GI Bill payments were not being disbursed. That outreach underscores the core issue: stakeholders outside VA were forced to determine the extent of the problem on their own because VA did not communicate it openly, even though it knew the risks to families. The absence of clear information created confusion for schools and exposed students to housing insecurity.

It is also important to view this incident in context. As discussed earlier, this was the third significant technology transition involving GI Bill payments in recent years that has caused considerable payment delays during implementation. Each was scheduled at the beginning of an academic term, when even minor interruptions can quickly lead to adverse outcomes for students. Modernizing systems is essential, but modernization that jeopardizes the delivery of core benefits is misguided. When the scheduling of VA's actions guarantees maximum disruption if anything goes wrong, the planning has already fallen short.

- **Problem:** VA continues to schedule major system changes at the start of academic terms, when even minor disruptions would create maximum harm.
- **Solution:** Congress should direct VA to avoid releasing education benefit system upgrades during critical enrollment or disbursement windows and require independent certification of readiness before launch.

There are practical steps VA should adopt to ensure this is avoided moving forward. Education benefits delivery must be treated as an essential function that does not pause when other parts of government do. A continuity plan is needed so that if one system fails or is offline, another is ready to take over. Institutions should receive clear guidance to avoid penalizing students for late payments due to circumstances beyond their control. Most importantly, when VA becomes aware of a significant risk to on-time payments, it should proactively share that information with students, institutions, policymakers, and advocates before financial harm occurs.

Student veterans, survivors, and their families do not view their education benefits as optional. Oftentimes, they plan their lives around these benefits because that is what they were told they could count on. VA must build on the lessons learned from these failures to reestablish trust with GI Bill students.

- **Problem:** Without stronger accountability and basic execution on benefits delivery, VA will continue to erode student trust in the GI Bill.
- **Solution:** Congress should strengthen oversight requirements, mandate transparent performance metrics, and ensure that students are not left bearing the cost of VA's failures.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and for your continued oversight as VA works to restore confidence in its delivery of education benefits. Veterans Education Success stands ready to support the Subcommittee in any way that helps protect the students and families who depend on these programs.

In summary, the five solutions we propose are for VA to:

- Implement reliable technical safeguards, transparent timelines, and actionable contingency plans for any failure to administer education benefits as otherwise anticipated;
- Adopt more rigorous testing of technology solutions and independent verification of efficacy; implement staged technology rollouts that prevent failures from reaching students in the first place;
- Provide proactive, plain-language notifications to students, schools, and oversight entities whenever payment risks are identified;
- Avoid releasing education benefit system upgrades during critical student enrollment or disbursement windows; instead, deploy upgrades during times of the year that are less likely to affect students negatively, and require independent certification of readiness before launch;
- Finally, for Congress to strengthen oversight requirements, mandate transparent performance metrics, and ensure that students are not left bearing the cost of VA's failures.

Finally, as the higher education industry continues to evolve in these unique times, we also emphasize the importance of maintaining high standards of quality. Student veterans, taxpayers, and Congress must expect the best outcomes from the use of hard-earned GI Bill benefits. We look forward to discussing and reviewing these topics and are grateful for the continued opportunity to collaborate on them.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our views with the Subcommittees and look forward to continued collaboration.

**Information Required by Rule XI, Clause 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives
and the Rules of the Committee on Veterans Affairs**

Pursuant to Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, Veterans Education Success has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2026, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.

**Information Required by the Rules of the Committee on Veterans Affairs Regarding
Foreign Government and Foreign Adversary Funding**

Pursuant to the Rules of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, and consistent with the definitions set forth in P.L. 118-50, Division H, § 2(g)(1), Veterans Education Success has not received any contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government, a foreign adversary-controlled entity, or an entity or country of particular concern.



**William Hubbard,
Vice President for Veterans & Military Policy**



William Hubbard serves as the Vice President for Veterans & Military Policy at Veterans Education Success, focused on advancing higher education success for service members, veterans, and their families, and protecting the promise of federal education programs. Previously, he served as the Vice President of Government Affairs and Chief of Staff for Student Veterans of America. He has frequently testified before Congress on a range of higher education and veterans issues and spearheaded the coalition that led to the unanimous passage of the Forever GI Bill.

Prior to his roles in higher education advocacy, Will worked as a Federal Strategy and Operations Consultant at Deloitte and spent several years serving government agencies, including the Department of the Navy, the Department of State, and the State of Indiana Department of Revenue in his role. He also served as a National Executive Committee Member of Deloitte's Armed Forces Business Resource Group.

Will joined the Marine Corps Reserves in 2006 and continues his service today, presently serving as a Consulting & Strategy Manager with the Marine Innovation Unit. His last overseas deployment was to Kabul City, Afghanistan, where he served in the Special Operations Joint Task Force as a member of a small cell of intelligence professionals. He also worked with Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to conduct activities in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief in Haiti.

He serves on the National Advocacy Council for the National Marrow Donor Program, and was previously a member of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development. He is a recipient of the American University Alumni Association's Rising Star Award for 2019.

Will graduated with a bachelor's degree in international studies from American University and has a certificate in International Law & Organizations from American University's School of Professional & Extended Studies. Will and his wife, Noelle, presently reside in Arlington, VA, with their daughters, Lucy, Ruby, and Zoey.