

Testimony of Justin Parke, Managing Director and Digital GI Bill Program Manager
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*Hearing before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs'
Subcommittee on Technology Modernization and Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Oversight*

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

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Chairmen Barrett and Van Orden, Ranking Members Budzinski and Pappas, and distinguished members of both Subcommittees, thank you for inviting me to testify at today’s hearing. I am Justin Parke, a Managing Director at Accenture Federal Services and a member of the Accenture Federal Leadership team. I am also the Program Manager of our Digital GI Bill engagement, leading the implementation and operations of Accenture Federal DGIB systems. I am honored to serve Veterans and their families in my role on this important program.

Accenture’s work with VA Education began in 2019, when VA decided to reset after a failed Colmery implementation attempt with a different vendor. This reset included the release of a competitive, outcome-based RFP that Accenture won. In partnership with VA, we delivered Colmery on time and on budget. After this, VA released another full and open competitive RFP for the Digital GI Bill (DGIB) implementation and operations. Accenture won this competition and since March 2021, we have supported VA’s efforts to make it faster and easier for Veterans to access and reliably receive life-changing education benefits.

We have achieved the main objectives for this contract: to process claims uninterrupted and to develop new capabilities based on requirements defined by VA, while enabling the retirement of VA legacy systems. For example, DGIB retired VA’s nearly 50-year-old BDN mainframe which has improved VA’s operational resilience and for the first time in the GI Bill’s 80-year history, has enabled fully automated claims processing for originals and new chapters.

Through our DGIB automation efforts with VA, this January more than 64% of all education claims are processed same-day, the vast majority of these in seconds, with no Veteran Claim Examiner (VCE) effort. Chapter 35 is now running at 69% same-day automated claims processing, radically improving VA’s posture for spring enrollment. Since March 2021, DGIB has processed over 16 million claims, delivering more than 43 billion dollars in Veteran benefits to 2.3 million unique beneficiaries.

There have also been challenges to overcome. As previously detailed by the OIG: additional requirements like new legislative mandates, new judicial interpretations, and additional system integrations expanded the scope from the original contract and non-DGIB dependencies delayed

the BDN retirement. During this BDN delay, VA re-prioritized several other efforts, including VETTEC 1.0 and My Education Benefits, and we delivered those capabilities ahead of schedule, ensuring that new advancements were still delivered to Veterans despite the BDN retirement delay.

The DGIB program's lifecycle cost estimate details the baseline costs expected for the overall VA program across multiple contracts with multiple vendors and other VA expenses. A smaller portion of this estimate is for the managed service vendor costs – that is, Accenture contract costs. The total Accenture contract ceiling is currently \$1.08 billion, inclusive of increased scope. Accenture contract cost is squarely within the baseline cost range for the scope and schedule ultimately required.

Moreover, DGIB results in significant cost avoidance, including an estimated \$250 million for BDN, \$400 million for other VA legacy systems, and \$400 million of claims processing staff time over 10 years. Without DGIB, VA would need to spend more on claims processing staff time to keep up with increased claim volumes. All of these savings compound year over year and in total, far exceed the \$1 billion in managed service contract ceiling.

As one of VA's most successful IT transformations, DGIB has overcome challenges and delivered on its commitments. Some conclusions to consider:

1. VA *can* achieve ambitious transformation, even when previous attempts over past decades have failed;
2. Baseline lifecycle cost estimates should include “known unknowns” like future legal mandates and other future fact-of-life changes that do not exist at program inception; and
3. Procurement organizations can tackle big business needs with Veteran outcome-based contracts like DGIB. With the right procurement strategy, VA leadership can drive critical mission outcomes in partnership with contractors.

With these lessons in mind, we look forward to working with VA to provide even more same-day experiences while complying with legal mandates-- delivering education benefits faster, easier, and more reliably, which is what our Veterans have earned and deserve. Thank you, I look forward to your questions.