**TESTIMONY OF**

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**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT**

**BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON**


**BEFORE THE**


**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**OF THE**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**


**LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:**

**"A CONTINUED REVIEW OF FOREVER GI BILL PAYMENT DELAYS"**


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Good afternoon, Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the

Subcommittee.  I am Richard Crowe, a Senior Vice President at Booz Allen Hamilton and the Client

Service Officer for Booz Allen's Health Account.  In that role, I lead a diverse portfolio of health services,

including numerous IT and healthcare operations service contracts.  I am pleased to be here with you

today to discuss the continued implementation of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational

Assistance Act of 2017 (Colmery Act) or, as it's more commonly referred to, the Forever GI Bill.

Booz Allen has a strong, demonstrated commitment to serving our nation's veteran population.

Booz Allen was founded by a veteran, and the company has supported the Department of Veterans

Affairs continuously since 1952.  Booz Allen takes great pride in our 65-year history of supporting

veterans, which we do in multiple ways.  Approximately one-third of our over 24,000 employees are

military-connected — meaning they are a veteran, in the National Guard, or a military spouse — and

Booz Allen invests in helping our military connected employees thrive through career building,

comprehensive benefits, formal programs for military spouse support, and support to the military and

veteran communities through innovative and impactful nonprofit partnerships.  We have a broad

portfolio of work at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and are committed to its mission to serve

veterans.

Over the past six years, we have been increasingly involved in supporting the IT mission at the

VA and in helping the VA with its broader IT modernization goals.  We have successfully completed more

than 100 IT related projects at the VA, and we have been helping the VA implement more modern

technologies to improve the veteran's experience.

Booz Allen currently supports implementation of Sections 107 and 501 of the Colmery Act as

part of its contract with the VA for the Benefits Integration Platform (BIP).  The BIP task order was

competitively awarded by the VA's Technology Acquisition Center in September 2017 and the VA issued

a modification covering the Colmery related software development in January 2018. We support and facilitate the improvements that are the subject of today's discussion in cooperation with the VA offices represented here today.

In our role as the software developer supporting BIP, Booz Allen translates each of the VA's identified user cases into a technical solution. The VA leads the requirements development process, which includes a requirements elaboration process in which Booz Allen participates. The output of the requirements elaboration process is a list of user cases for software development and the criteria for user acceptance testing. The VA maps and determines the benefits outcome for each user case based upon the VA's interpretation of the statutes, regulations, policy, and business rules associated with the relevant benefits program. Our job as software developers is to ensure that the developed code produces the desired end results. The user cases developed in the requirements elaboration process serve as the contractually agreed-upon acceptance criteria for each new software release.

Booz Allen appreciates this opportunity to reflect upon the challenges that led to the VA's decision to postpone deployment of the new software into production beyond last August 1. As I shall describe below, the unfortunate delay has been caused by the confluence of outdated systems being asked to perform ever complex tasks.

The Colmery Act required numerous changes to the Department's underlying regulations, policies, and business rules. Stated simply, the volume of changes to the business rules, which shifted the way in which housing allowances are paid, made it difficult to capture the full scope of potential user cases as part of the requirements development process. The Colmery Act revisions required not only new business rules, but also a greater number of determinations regarding the interactions of those revised rules that caused the volume of user cases to expand in scope as development progressed. During testing performed in June and August 2018, the VA identified user scenarios that required

further revision, as well as additional user scenarios that were absent from the initial release. Booz Allen worked tirelessly to incorporate these additional user scenarios into the software release candidates delivered this Fall.

From a technical perspective, two of the primary factors driving the length of time necessary to implement these changes were the high number of system dependencies and the age of the underlying systems. From a numbers perspective, the updated release required under the Colmery Act draws on data elements housed in four other distinct underlying, legacy VA systems. Because no single database contains all the information necessary to assess benefits eligibility, we must draw data from these systems to obtain the required information to make decisions. The VA is the master systems integrator for all of these systems. Booz Allen has responsibility under BIP for only one of these systems: the Long Term Solution (LTS) system we are charged with modernizing. The rest of these systems are maintained by the VA or other contractors. As such, developing a solution that pulls data from these systems requires patches, updates, and other coordinated efforts to ensure successful synching of data.

At the same time, many of the underlying IT systems required to implement the changes were past, at, or very near their intended dates for retirement. Indeed, at the time it competed the BIP contract, the VA had envisioned retiring many of these legacy systems. The Colmery Act reprioritized that timeline. As a result, we have had to program an elaborate set of interfaces to draw from these different systems. These essential efforts have required further system design, coordinated testing, and requirements validation.

In summary, from Booz Allen's vantage point, the events that bring our panel before this Subcommittee today stem from the challenges posed by endeavoring to build new software — to address more rules and additional variables — on something very old. The obstacles encountered have not been failures of the new software, but rather, the result of performing the work on a fragile

infrastructure that was not originally designed to perform the task requested, and calling upon these multiple, interrelated IT systems. These are the key challenges driving the duration of the development process.

Although there have been challenges, there have been notable successes in the first year of the BIP program. Booz Allen has successfully updated approximately sixty percent of the legacy LTS code. We have helped the VA achieve greater efficiencies and implement best practices during this release process that will improve the overall efficiency of this IT system moving forward. Further, in parallel to this effort, we have been working with the VA to implement the modernization plans in other areas that continue to drive toward the VA's goal of a modern, micro-services-based technology stack. In short, we have already enabled the lessons learned from this process to help the VA minimize the obstacles encountered for the benefit of all future IT modernization efforts.

We look forward to discussing these successes, as well as challenges, in greater detail with the Subcommittee and, more importantly, we look forward to continuing to provide support to the Veterans Administration as they enhance education benefits for veterans, service members, families and survivors through the implementation of the Colmery Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today. I look forward to your questions.