



**American GI Forum of the United States**  
*A Veterans Family Organization Since 1948 Chartered by Congress 1998*  
**National Office**

635 W. Corona Ave, Suite 114 • Pueblo, CO 81004  
(719) 299-4838/4839

**Founded  
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## **American GI Forum of the United States September 21 Written Testimony**

**I am Lawrence Guzman Romo, American GI Forum Legislative Committee Chairman. Mr Mario Perales, American GI Forum National Vice Commander and also Sergio Dickerson, Vice-President Client Services, from the American GI Forum National Veterans Outreach Program (NVOP) assisted in our analysis of these draft legislative bills. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Takano, for the opportunity to present testimony on the proposed legislative bills.**

- 1) The proposed H.R. 4874 – 117th CONGRESS: Fly Vets Act, to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements to the use of educational assistance provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for flight training programs, should be considered for passage as long as it is from the existing Federal GI Bill dollars that a veteran has obtained as their current benefit.**
- 2) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to eliminate the Freddie Mac conforming loan limitation for loans made to veterans with remaining guaranty or insurance loan entitlement under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, is fully supported. It is essential that we increase home ownership opportunities for our veterans and their families. We just need to always ensure that the veteran is financially qualified for their home loans.**
- 3) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to pay to certain veterans, who receive certain educational assistance furnished by the Secretary, a weekly stipend for child care services is a wonderful initiative that we tentatively support but we are concerned of the new costs, where the money would be appropriated from, and have questions on some details. What is the cost estimate, the estimate of veteran participating and number of children? Will the Veterans Administration pay the child care vendor to ensure direct payment? The veterans could do a Work Study**

**Program which the Veterans Administration already has to supplement their income to pay for childcare. Participation in the work study program is beneficial as the veteran gives back to the community and to themselves at the same time.**

**4) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code to provide for the transfer of entitlement to educational assistance under Post 9/11 Educational Assistance Program of Department of Veterans Affairs when an eligible individual dies after approval of transfer and before transferring all of the individual's entitlement, and for other purposes, definitely should be considered for passage as the GI Bill is an earned benefit by the veteran. Family members sacrifice and serve with their veteran family member while they were in the military. This bill as written is fully supported.**

**5) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship to include spouses and children of individuals who die from a service-connected disability within 120 days of serving in the Armed Forces, and for other purposes, definitely should be passed. We are especially comfortable with the 120-day period as it is an optimal and reasonable time period expansion.**

**6) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to prohibit the use of entitlement to educational assistance under the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program for secondary school education should be clarified. It appears the bill corrects a mistake of what the true intent of the language of the current bill. The intent is to have educational assistance at the post-secondary level, not secondary level. We are in agreement that use should be prohibited at the secondary level but absolutely must be maintained at the post-secondary level.**

**7) The proposed legislative bill to have adjustments of grants awarded by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for comprehensive service programs to serve homeless veterans is a very good bill that we support after discussing with the American GI Forum NVOP which deals directly with homeless veterans programs. The grants they have received from the Veterans Administration do not require matching grants. The NVOP can then use funds to optimize dollars supporting homeless veteran programs when other agencies such as HUD and other federal, state, county, city and private organizations require matching grants.**

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**8) The proposed legislative bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on grants for care for elderly homeless veterans, and for other purposes is a bill we fully support with the following comments from the American GI Forum NVOP. 1) A missing aspect of our current housing strategy for elderly or severely disabled veterans is transitioning them to assisted living or hospice care when a veteran is unable to care for themselves. 2) The grants should be awarded to providers with SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families) and GPD (Grant and Per Diem) homeless programs that have a long-standing history of housing veterans. 3) Consider the cost associated with elderly care, hospice or assisted living expenses. 4) In lieu of transitioning the veteran to hospice or assisted living, nurses would be instrumental in providing services to a veteran that requires assistance with activities of daily living or needing consistent medical attention and monitoring. We assume this will supplement the Aid and Attendance Program.**

**9) The proposed legislative bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on substance use and alcohol use disorder recovery for homeless veterans, and for other purposes, is fully supported with the following comments from the American GI Forum NVOP. 1) These substance abuse programs should be piloted with provider agencies that have SSVF or GPD homeless programs already working with veterans with substance and mental health issues. By adding this pilot program, it would enhance the housing success of these existing programs. 2) Encourage you to include well-established programs with proven track records among the pilot sites. Pilot program should also be conducted in an area with a large veteran population such as San Antonio as to attract a good cross-section of the homeless veteran population with all ages, branches, & ranks represented. 3) With substance abuse, comes a number of issues that drive Veterans to use in the first place: PTSD, depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, hyper-alertness, and the like. These conditions must also be treated in tandem with substance abuse treatment to be successful. 4) We reiterate that we expect these numbers to be high for the estimate of the numbers of veterans with substance use disorder proposed to be provided with such recovery services. 5) Should choose an organization that has a proven record working with veterans with substance abuse problems. 6). We recommend that a standardized assessment is provided to pilot sites so that there will be consistency from program to program allowing for better data collection/analysis. 7) Training will be needed and appreciated to help set the standards and**

ensure that the organization delivering these services are performed successfully: veteran services, homeless services, and substance use treatment in accordance in a manner that is both recovery-oriented and trauma-informed. 8) We would also encourage consideration of incorporating objective measures of effectiveness using tools such as the Addiction Severity Index or an Adult Needs and Strengths Assessment. 9) We request reexamination of this language, people in recovery continue to identify as “alcoholics” or “addicts” years after their last drink/use. “The number of veterans who still have a substance use disorder within 180 days of discharge from receipt of services provided under this section.” 10) “ELIGIBLE ENTITIES” means ELIGIBLE VETERANS ONLY.

10) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide technical assistance to recipients of grants for supportive services for very low-income families in permanent housing and comprehensive service programs, and for other purposes, we fully support with the following comments from the American GI Forum NVOP. 1) The training provided by the Veterans Administration will give a basis for standardized assistance across providers. An adherence to program guidance, fidelity to the service model (consistent with its original intent), and can be held accountable for any deficiencies. 2) Grants or contracts should be with experienced Veteran Service Providers with housing and employment experience.

11) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase and extend the authorization of appropriations for homeless veterans, reintegration programs is and essential bill to pass. We must reduce and eliminate veteran homelessness by increasing and extending the authorization. The homeless veteran proudly served our country and we must help them to reintegrate back to society.

12) The proposed legislative bill to extend the delimiting period for certain individuals to use educational assistance benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs is definitely a bill that should be considered for passage. This bill helps veterans by giving them more flexibility in using their earned educational benefits.

13) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to adjust the rate of per diem payments provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to grantees that provide services to homeless veterans,

is fully supported with the following comments from the American GI Forum NVOP. We recommend an increase in per diem not just for eligible veterans, but also for veterans who fall under the humanitarian care. This group is comprised of the underprivileged veterans that are homeless and have serious mental health issues. These veterans require mental health, housing and job training, preparation and employment. They could also need apprenticeships to develop skills to attain better paying jobs. During the COVID pandemic, additional case management, security and hotel accommodations needed to comply with CDC and local community requirements should also be considered.

14) The proposed legislative bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs repays members of the Armed Forces for certain contributions made by such members towards Post 9/11 Educational Assistance, is recommended for passage. This bill is a fair way to compensate a limited number of veterans that paid into their GI Bill benefit.

15) The proposed legislative bill to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to establish protections under that act for a member of the Armed Forces who leaves a course of education, paid for with certain educational assistance, to perform certain service, is an absolute must bill to pass. This bill is critical, because it definitely helps the veteran through no fault of their own when they are activated as a reservist, national guard member and have to leave their academic program that they are participating in under the GI Bill. This bill protects the veteran financially, academically and with individual and family wellness.

16) The proposed legislative bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a report on the shallow subsidy program under the supportive services for veteran families programs, and for other purposes is an imperative bill to pass. We need to ensure we get a thorough report on the program for providing rental 5 subsidies under section 62.34(a)(8) of title 38, Code of 6 Federal Regulations (or any successor regulation) (in these 7 sections referred to as the "program"). The requested detailed information in the bill should provide a thorough analysis if optimal outreach is being done for all veterans.

17) The proposed legislative bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to improve public transportation services for veterans is a bill that should be considered for passage. The

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challenge is what is the ultimate goal with this pilot program. There are over 3000 counties and about 20,000 incorporated cities in the United States and territories. A partnership will definitely be necessary with the US Department of Transportation to review what are the best ideas to provide as many veterans improved public transportation services. This program might be cost prohibitive in the long run unless there is a reduction in the veterans that use the mileage reimbursement option that is currently authorized.

18) The proposed legislative bill to have the Veterans Affairs Secretary report the effectiveness of the Warrior Training Advancement Course and whether it should be expanded to other federal agencies is a good bill. We need to ensure the time and funds allocated to the program is enhancing veterans' employment after training under this program which will lead to an interview and hire at one of VBA's 56 Regional Offices around the country.

19) The proposed legislation to expand eligibility for a certain work-study allowance paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to certain individuals who pursue programs of rehabilitation, education, or training on at least a half-time basis is a wonderful bill. The bill will give more flexibility for veterans to increase their income from a work study job while they attend school that may not be able to participate in a work study job at full time or  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. The student veteran will pick up valuable work skills while attending school and will be helping out their fellow veterans at the work study approved site.

Appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. If there are any additional questions, please feel free to call either Lawrence Guzman Romo at 210-219-1905, or Mario Perales at 432-290-3353, or Sergio Dickerson on the homeless veterans related bills at 210-223-4088.



**Lawrence Guzman Romo**  
**American GI Forum National Legislative Committee Chairman**  
**Base Naming Commissioner**  
**Lieutenant Colonel, USAF Reserves, Retired**  
**Former US Selective Service System Director**