

**Testimony of Kyle Michl**  
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*Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and Subcommittee on Technology Modernization*

“Reviewing the Digital G.I. Bill Program”

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Chairman Van Orden, Chairman Rosendale, Ranking Member Levin, Ranking Member Cherfilus-McCormick, and members of the Subcommittees on Economic Opportunity and Technology Modernization, thank you for inviting me to testify at today’s hearing. I am Kyle Michl, the Senior Delivery Lead for the Digital GI Bill (“DGIB”) Delivery Program and the Chief Innovation Officer of Accenture Federal Services (“Accenture Federal” or the “Company”). We are proud to testify here today with our client and partner, the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs (“VA”), and our colleagues from MITRE, on our joint efforts to modernize and improve GI Bill claims processing for beneficiaries including Veterans, service members, and their dependents.

***Accenture Federal Services***

Accenture Federal is a leading U.S. federal services company and subsidiary of Accenture LLP. For more than four decades, we have helped clients in defense, national security, public safety, civilian, and military health organizations take on the demands of their mission, mandate, or moment. We put our clients at the forefront of change, harnessing it to solve the country’s mission-critical challenges. Our teams bring the most advanced R&D, latest technologies, and human-centered design together with the power and commercial innovation of Accenture’s global network to help clients achieve desired outcomes and build a digital core that fuels continuous innovation and creates value for their customers, workforce, and partners. Mission success is at the heart of everything we do, and we are privileged to advance our clients’ priorities, particularly as we serve our Veteran community through our work with VA.

Accenture Federal has a longstanding partnership with VA collaborating on programs that deliver meaningful outcomes for Veterans, service members, and their families. For example, Accenture Federal was selected to successfully implement the Harry W. Colmery

Act—delivering mission-critical VA Education Service claims processing that Veterans rely on for timely, accurate disbursement of payments. We support the VA Home Loan Program by providing development, security, and operations of Loan Guaranty (“LGY”) systems, and platform configuration and implementation alongside VA’s Office of Information and Technology’s (“OIT’s”) Service Management Office.

I have worked for Accenture for 26 years and had the privilege to serve our government clients for nearly 20 years. I have been a member of our federal leadership team since July 2020 when I became Accenture Federal’s Chief Innovation Officer. In that role, I focus on bringing the best of emerging technologies to help our clients modernize and transform their business. Over the years, I have delivered large scale programs for both civilian and defense agencies and took on the Senior Delivery Lead role for the VA DGIB program in May 2022.

### ***DGIB Program History and Successes***

Since March 2021, Accenture Federal has supported VA under the DGIB Delivery Program to improve access for Veterans to the educational benefits they have earned. Together, we are streamlining education claims processing and transforming systems for VA’s Veterans Benefits Administration (“VBA”) through human-centered design, service modernization, analytics, training, communications, and other services. With DGIB, we are creating simple digital experiences to help Veterans and their families complete their educational journeys more efficiently. In addition to transforming the user experience, the DGIB Program enables implementation of legislation in a more rapid and agile manner, including the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020. Below are examples of how this program is serving Veterans:

- ***Continuous Delivery of Meaningful Outcomes:*** VA and Accenture Federal have delivered six major releases, as well as a regular cadence of smaller, agile releases to our platform. With each release, VA provides requirements for Accenture Federal to implement within VA’s complex ecosystem of policy, procedures, and integrated systems. In addition to providing enhanced Veteran and stakeholder services, these releases are aimed at driving automation and improving time to receipt of benefits. Together, VA and Accenture Federal have made significant strides in areas including

user experience, service enhancements, program insights, and processing efficiencies.

Release spotlights include:

- ***Intuitive User Experience & Rapid Decisions for Eligible First-Time Beneficiaries:*** We delivered new functionality for beneficiaries applying for their Post-9/11 GI Bill® benefits for the first time. Through new, intuitive designs and updated functionalities—such as a pre-filled service history function—we have streamlined and simplified the process to apply for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, making it easier than ever to complete. By reducing eligibility processing from 30 days down to a matter of minutes, as well as providing the ability to retrieve digital copies of decision letters, we are helping applicants start their educational journey faster than ever before. For the first time in the GI Bill’s 79-year history, these enhancements automate original claims.
- ***Providing Schools Modernized Claim Capabilities:*** After beneficiaries start their educational journey, School Certifying Officials (“SCOs”) are the front door to continuing and completing their educational goals. To better serve SCOs’ Veteran-focused mission, we introduced Enrollment Manager—replacing a decades old legacy system—streamlining the process to submit enrollments for students. More than 15,000 SCOs have accessed Enrollment Manager since launch. The new system has reduced the number of steps to enter an enrollment to as few as five (5) clicks, and, already, more than 1.4M enrollments have been submitted. Most importantly, SCOs now have more time to focus on what matters most—helping Veterans, service members, and their families meet and exceed their educational goals.
- ***24/7 Chat Support for Schools:*** With the release of the new GI Bill Chatbot, SCOs now have live 24/7 support and quick access to answers and key information. Since the release, there have been over 7,000 sessions with SCOs resulting in a decreased number of calls to the VA Education Call Center (ECC) and real-time triage of questions from schools. This new functionality helps SCOs rapidly complete accurate claims to support beneficiaries.

- ***Powering Meaningful Employment for Veterans:*** We migrated the processing of VET TEC claims—a pilot program aimed at connecting Veterans to with leading technology training programs and employment—to DGIB. The results are improved processing of claims and monitoring of Veteran training and attainment of meaningful employment.
- ***Omni-Channel Communication Outreach to GI Bill Beneficiaries:*** By adding new email and text message enrollment verification options, we reduced the risk of students having their payments withheld, all without overwhelming the VA Education Call Center (“ECC”). This implements part of Section 1010 within the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, which requires students to verify enrollment for housing allowance and/or kicker payments. This is just one example of many agile legislative implementation successes.
- ***Demonstrated Claim Automation Improvement:*** By automating the first original claim in VA Education Service history, DGIB increased original automation rates from 0% to 32% in May 2023. For supplemental claims, the automation rate in May 2023 was 62%, 13 percentage points higher than the same month last year and 27 percentage points higher than when DGIB efforts began. Notably, DGIB achieved a record high supplemental claim automation rate of 68% in February 2023.
- ***Modernized Legacy Systems:*** With streamlined VA processes and our new technology platform, we have achieved a 99.99% system availability rate for claims processing and we are helping VA decommission antiquated legacy IT systems to improve the speed and accuracy of its education claims processes. We have sunset a number of legacy systems, including retiring two of the three largest legacy systems. As part of our modernization efforts, we have exceeded DGIB’s three-year IT infrastructure reduction targets. The improvements provide enhanced user experience, near real-time eligibility and benefits information, and more timely and accurate delivery of education services to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries annually.
- ***Analytic Insights Powering Service Improvements:*** A recently deployed new DGIB analytics capability provides several benefits, such as enabling certain reports to be completed in hours rather than days. This new capability acts as a single source of data

for ad hoc requests, and providing a foundation for AI use cases that may include claims optimization, operations, user experience, automation, fraud detection, compliance, and oversight.

- ***Award Winning Transformation Approaches:*** Working with VA, we are reimagining the GI Bill experience in other ways by driving transparency and outcomes and keeping stakeholders informed. To help communicate awareness, impact, and outcomes, we have applied an omni-channel, comprehensive, data-driven approach for key stakeholder groups (*e.g.*, beneficiaries, SCOs, employers, State Approving Agencies (“SAAs”), Congress, Veterans Service Organizations (“VSOs”), and media outlets). This includes over 500 email campaigns, 35 videos, in-person outreach events, and hundreds of social media campaigns to successfully reach nearly two million stakeholders. The results—recognized by the 2022 International Marcom and PR Daily Awards—have successfully increased the awareness of the GI Bill, further enabling more Veterans, service members, and families to achieve their educational goals, increasing their opportunities and lifetime earnings.

### ***Path Forward***

A large complex program like DGIB has numerous dependencies,<sup>1</sup> both within and external to the program. Recognizing this, VA and Accenture Federal have established governance processes to identify risks early and assess impacts. Accenture Federal worked jointly with VA to outline and agree to an updated roadmap, key dependencies, and target schedule. Subsequently, gaps were identified in the availability and number of planned VA testing environments and the timelines for external non-DGIB system development. Together, VA and Accenture Federal have continued to make progress on DGIB milestones while jointly working through options to address the gaps in these dependencies.

We are actively engaged with VA to replan future releases and address challenges to the path forward. We have worked closely with VA to outline potential options for a path forward while continuing to fulfill program commitments. Given the significant progress made jointly

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<sup>1</sup> A dependency refers to any number of prerequisite requirements for contract performance. Numerous contract dependencies exist with respect to other VA programs.

with VA on future release capabilities, we are optimistic our partnership with VA will continue to provide world-class modernized services to Veteran beneficiaries. This includes deploying developed capabilities like Approval Manager, Workload Manager, and Benefits Manager that will replace aging legacy systems with modern technologies and digital experiences.

### ***Conclusion***

We remain steadfast in our commitment to deliver modernization, improve user experience through human centered design, seamlessly implement legislation, execute a clearly defined communications and training strategy, and integrate legacy IT systems to make a dramatic difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Veterans, service members, and their families. Through the use of innovative technologies, we are strengthening the foundation that provides agile, rapid deployments, improved automation, and enhanced data insight using machine learning. We are proud to help VA bring to life its truly bold DGIB vision. This transformation puts Veterans at the heart of the experience and positions VA as a leader in providing benefits. Our focus will always be on delivering the best outcomes for our client, for Veterans and for the American taxpayer.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.