



December 13, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell,

On behalf of the Reserve Officers Association (ROA), now doing business as the Reserve Organization of America, and the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, we offer our appreciation for your bipartisan focus on legislation related to reauthorization of higher education funding provided by VA and DOD and your ironclad support of a strong American military.

We write you today about S. 2857, the “Protect Veterans’ Education and Taxpayer Spending Act of 2019.” While the bill’s authors and advocates surely approached this legislation with the best of intentions, ROA and EANGUS think its effects will be pernicious to those it purports to benefit.

The bill would shift DoD and VA education funding to the “90 percent” of the 90/10 ratio (we believe the ratio is unnecessary) and would exert new standards on only the for-profit “proprietary” education sector. The bill’s supporters claim that it is good legislation in part because it was generated by lots of well-meaning and thoughtful people, and we’re sure it was. Yet the result is a biased and frankly unnecessary crackdown on an oft-unfairly maligned education sector that’s increasingly important to GI Bill users, as well as other “non-traditional” students.

The bill’s phase-in and appeals mechanisms will do little to ease the impact of burdening the proprietary sector, which VA estimated could hurt some 66,000 veterans now using the GI Bill: that’s about 10 percent of current GI Bill beneficiaries. As you may know, this bill is popular among our fellow advocates; we wonder where else they’d countenance decreasing benefits to 10 percent of their constituencies . . .

The bill’s popularity is rooted in a perception that for-profits are aggressive marketers, that they have low graduation rates, that they fail and leave students stranded, that they don’t equip students to get jobs, and so forth. While some of this has been the case, largely in the past, the truth is becoming quite different. We would be happy to discuss details with your team; included herewith is a “dear colleague” letter ROA wrote to fellow members of The Military Coalition, whose Reserve and National Guard Committee ROA is proud to chair.

Bottom line: proprietary schools offer benefits hard to come by in the traditional sector, including flexibility, and technical or vocational training.

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Veterans have the right to use their GI Bill benefits as they choose within law and regulation; once earned, it's theirs and not the government's to protect. We have heard that some courses of study are unworthy of "government money." Yet, the state approving agency process exists to make appropriate discriminations based on merit and quality.

Speaking of discrimination, if a school must raise tuition to compensate for the 90/10 "loophole closing," which students may be least likely to come up with the extra money, or travel farther to attend a different school?

The military operates on standards applied to all; our veterans served for liberty and the right to make their own decisions in life; ROA supports valid standards fairly applied, with robust "consumer information" widely available to facilitate good choices.

If Congress determines that to safeguard quality education for GI Bill beneficiaries, it must refine standards beyond those applied by state approving agencies, those standards should be applied to the entire education sector (with exceptions as provided for by the Minority Serving Institutions Program), not just the proprietary education sector.

ROA represents members of the Reserve and National Guard, their families, and veterans of the Reserve force. Many are using or will use their education benefits – or transfer benefits to family – to get good jobs in areas such as aviation, HVAC, commercial truck driving, and the culinary arts, to name a few. Applying arbitrary "ratios" that appear devised to punish an entire sector for the transgressions of a few, and "protect" beneficiaries whose interests would be better served by quality information and consistent standards will have one predictable effect: fewer choices for those who earned them.

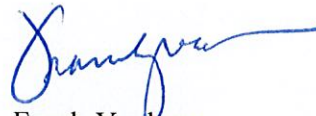
ROA recognizes that institutions of higher learning have not always behaved well. That doesn't justify hobbling an entire sector, creating government-chosen "winners" in the education market, and reducing options for those who earned them with military service to the nation.

We thank you for your bipartisan efforts to strike a balance that enhances the utility of education benefits for those who earned them, and for your lifelong service to our nation.

Respectfully,



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