



**STATEMENT**

**OF**

**MATTHEW BRENNAN  
EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION POLICY ANALYST  
VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION DIVISION  
THE AMERICAN LEGION**

**BEFORE THE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**ON**

**"PENDING AND DRAFT LEGISLATION"**

**MARCH 30, 2023**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**STATEMENT OF  
MATTHEW BRENNAN, EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION POLICY ANALYST  
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Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished subcommittee members, on behalf of National Commander Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola and the 1.6 million dues-paying members of The American Legion, we thank you for inviting The American Legion to testify today.

The American Legion is directed by active Legionnaires who dedicate their time and resources to serve veterans and their families. As a resolution-based organization, our positions are guided by more than 104 years of advocacy and resolutions that originate at the grassroots level of our organization. Every time The American Legion testifies, we offer a direct voice from the veteran community to Congress.

**H.R. 291 – Vaccine Discharge Parity Act**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that a member of the Armed Forces, granted a general discharge under honorable conditions on the sole basis that such member failed to obey a lawful order to receive a vaccine for COVID-19, is eligible for certain educational assistance administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.*

From 2019 to 2021, more than 36,000 veterans with "general discharges under honorable conditions" (general discharge) were denied Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits due to current laws barring them from receiving the Post-9/11 GI Bill despite their honorable service to our nation.<sup>1</sup>

To access most Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits, veterans must have either an honorable discharge or a general discharge under honorable conditions. However, only veterans with an honorable discharge are entitled to the GI Bill; veterans who have received a general discharge cannot access the educational benefits the Post-9/11 GI Bill provides.

As authors of the 1944 *Servicemen's Readjustment Act* – commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights – The American Legion takes pride in advocating for policies aligned with its original intent. The

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense email to The American Legion. January 31, 2022.

original GI Bill intended to give veterans with any type of discharge (except dishonorable) access to education benefits. We believe there is no compelling reason to deviate from this intent.

This draft legislation seeks to amend title 38 of United States Code to ensure service members discharged under honorable conditions are eligible for VA educational benefits. Although this legislation is limited to veterans that received a general discharge solely for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine, The American Legion commends Congress for taking meaningful steps to restore the GI Bill's original intent. Now, more than ever, we must honor our veterans by ensuring they receive the benefits they rightfully earned.

Through *Resolution No. 20: Amend Title 38, United States Code, to Provide GI Bill Education Benefits for Veterans Receiving a General Discharge Under Honorable Conditions*, The American Legion supports legislation that ensures that servicemembers issued a general discharge under honorable conditions receive full education benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>2</sup>

**The American Legion supports H.R. 291 as currently written.**

### **H.R. 645 – Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to permanently authorize the use of certain funds to improve flexibility in the provision of assistance to homeless veterans, and for other purposes.*

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) 2022 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, on any given night, a minimum of 33,129 veterans experienced homelessness in 2022. This accounts for approximately seven percent of all homeless adults. Furthermore, of every 10,000 veterans, 20 experienced homelessness. By comparison, of every 10,000 non-veterans, 18 experienced homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

Although these statistics are alarming, The American Legion is pleased that homeless veterans declined by 11 percent between 2020 and 2022. Despite this progress, The American Legion believes that one homeless veteran is one too many. That is why it is critical to identify and enhance the variables that caused this favorable trend; this ensures continuous progress.

In 2020, the number of homeless veterans increased for the first time since 2010. The American Legion urged Congress to take immediate action. Congress answered the call and passed the *Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020* (Public Law 116-315). This bill was signed into law on January 5, 2021, and instantly

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<sup>2</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 20 (2022): *Amend Title 38, United States Code, to Provide GI Bill Education Benefits for Veterans Receiving a General Discharge Under Honorable Conditions*.

<https://archive.legion.org/node/7912>. Unless otherwise noted, all cited hyperlinks accessed March 28, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of Community Planning and Development. "The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress." December 2022.

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

increased resources for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to aid homeless veterans. This statute is one of the variables that reduced the number of homeless veterans.<sup>3</sup>

The *Isakson and Roe Act* allows the VA to redirect funds to provide homeless veterans shelter, food, clothing, blankets, hygiene items, transportation, and communication devices. In addition, it allows the VA to collaborate with organizations to use its property to shelter these veterans. Unfortunately, the VA will lose its ability to provide these vital resources in a matter of weeks. Under the *Isakson and Roe Act*, the VA's ability to redirect funds for these benefits is limited to public health emergencies. Consequently, maintaining the status quo will hinder the VA's ability to timely provide homeless veterans with essential resources after the COVID-19 pandemic emergency ends on May 11, 2023.

The American Legion urges Congress to prevent more veterans from going without the basic resources they need to transition out of homelessness successfully. The *Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act* addresses this issue by permanently authorizing the VA to redirect funds to improve flexibility in the provision of assistance to homeless veterans.

The American Legion commends Representative Cherfilus-McCormick for this approach. Making emergency flexibilities under the *Isakson and Roe Act* permanent will ensure veterans are equipped with the necessities needed to transition into permanent housing and a stable livelihood. The American Legion believes the *Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act* undoubtedly takes us one step closer to eliminating veteran homelessness.

Through Resolution No. 15: *Supportive Services Funding for Homeless and At-Risk Veterans*, The American Legion supports the efforts of the public and private sector agencies and organizations with resources necessary to aid homeless veterans and their families.<sup>4</sup>

**The American Legion supports H.R. 645 as currently written.**

### **H.R. 728**

*To direct the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans Employment and Training to carry out a pilot program on short-term fellowship programs for veterans.*

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<sup>3</sup> *Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020*, Pub. L. No. 116–315, Title IV, §4201, 134 Stat. 5008 (2021), <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=134&page=5008>.

<sup>4</sup> The American Legion Resolution No 15 (2022): *Supportive Services Funding for Homeless and At-Risk Veterans*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/8410>.

Many of the approximately 200,000 servicemembers that transition out of the military every year face difficulty finding employment.<sup>5</sup> The current veteran unemployment rate is 2.5%,<sup>6</sup> but the Pew Research Center found that only 25 percent have a job lined up after service.<sup>7</sup>

Cultural gaps and a lack of seamless integration between veteran care programs hinder gainful employment,<sup>8</sup> and employers who invalidate military experience can further exacerbate the issue. Often, employers don't hire qualified veterans due to translation. The Pew Research Center found that 79 percent of recently retired veterans find it challenging to translate their military skills into something a civilian hiring manager can understand.<sup>9</sup>

This legislation will create a paid, short-term fellowship program that will offer servicemembers networking, professional training, and hands-on experience in the civilian workforce, with the opportunity for full-time employment upon program completion. This fellowship program will serve as an additional pathway to gainful employment and foster more resilient integration between veteran care programs.<sup>10</sup>

The Transition Assistant Program (TAP) helps servicemembers transition from military to civilian life; however, more is needed. Whether through higher education institutions or employment pathways, veteran fellowship programs have proven success in providing veterans with the opportunity to enhance their skills or learn new traits. This is simply another tool to aid veterans in their transition. The American Legion is committed to ensuring servicemembers are fully prepared to confidently enter the workforce.

Through Resolution No. 316: *Support Employment of Veterans in the Public and Private Workforce*, The American Legion supports legislative and administrative measures that encourage veteran hiring.<sup>11</sup>

**The American Legion supports H.R. 728 as currently written.**

### **Draft Legislation**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide that educational assistance*

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<sup>5</sup> “The transition to post-military employment” Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/09/10/the-transition-to-post-military-employment/>.

<sup>6</sup> Veteran Unemployment Rates | U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/latest-numbers>.

<sup>7</sup> “Veterans struggle to find work after military: We still want to give the best of ourselves” CBS News. February 23, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/veterans-jobs-american-corporate-partners/>.

<sup>8</sup> “5 Reasons Why Employers Are Not Hiring Vets” Military.com. <https://www.military.com/hiring-veterans/resources/5-reasons-why-employers-are-not-hiring-vets.html>.

<sup>9</sup> “Study Shows Vets Struggle to Translate Experience” Military.com. <https://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/career-advice/2013/11/21/study-shows-vets-struggle-to-translate-experience.html>.

<sup>10</sup> “Why Can't Some Veterans Get Jobs” VA News. <https://news.va.gov/6603/why-can%e2%80%99t-veterans-get-jobs>.

<sup>11</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 316 (2016): *Support Employment of Veterans in the Public and Private Workforce*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/468>.

*paid under Department of Veterans Affairs educational assistance programs to an individual who pursued a program or course of education that was suspended or terminated for certain reasons shall not be charged against the entitlement of the individual, and for other purposes.*

Between fiscal years 2016 and 2020, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disbursed nearly \$60 billion in educational benefits to institutions of higher learning to help veterans and their families obtain credentials to make them competitive job market candidates.<sup>12</sup> However, due to fraudulent actors and school closings, many veterans find themselves deprived of their benefits, saddled with debt, and without the credentials they sought to obtain. When this occurs, veterans have little recourse to recoup their hard-earned educational benefits.

This draft legislation stipulates that for an institution or academic program to be approved to receive VA educational benefits, it must agree that if the institution closes, suspends, or terminates a course or program due to a determination of fraud by the Commissioner of the Federal Trade Commission or the Secretary of Education, it shall repay all educational funds received back to the VA. The American Legion supports measures to increase accountability for higher-learning institutions eligible for VA educational benefits and policies that extend federal protections for veterans. Victims of school closures or fraud should have their veterans' education benefits restored. While The American Legion supports this legislation's goal to increase accountability for institutions of higher learning, we are concerned about language in the draft bill which states that a course or program can be suspended or terminated due to information collected as part of a Risk-Based Survey (RBS) under title 38, United States Code §3673A.

Since its implementation on October 1, 2022, The American Legion has carefully monitored the rollout of RBSs through outreach to State Approving Agencies (SAAs) and institutions of higher learning. Our findings conclude that the risk-based survey's efficacy depends on the extent to which data on critical institution performance indicators, including graduation rates, closure risk, average debt, and long-term earnings, is available for SAAs. Only through sufficient data will SAAs and lawmakers be able to hold institutions accountable for using taxpayer dollars to provide inadequate education to veterans. VA has yet to establish a comprehensive database necessary for the proper function of the risk-based oversight model, resulting in an implementation fraught with difficulties. Many institutions of higher learning have been ordered to complete RBSs because of the reporting of incorrect data and false triggers. Without the essential data, this will continue to occur.

Through Resolution No. 304: *Support Accountability for Institutions of Higher Learning*, The American Legion supports this draft legislation with changes.<sup>13</sup> The American Legion supports the policy to restore GI Bill beneficiaries' education benefits. However, the means that determine whether a school is compliant must be adequate to the extent that they do not threaten the pursuit of GI Bill beneficiaries' academic endeavors. Accordingly, The American Legion urges Congress to establish a timeline for VA to construct the database as established by title 38, United States Code §3673A(c), to provide SAAs with the critical information needed to operate the RBS successfully.

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<sup>12</sup> Annual Benefits Report (2020). [https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2020\\_education.pdf](https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2020_education.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 304 (2016): *Support Accountability for Institutions of Higher Learning*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/459>.

**The American Legion supports this draft legislation *with amendments.***

**Draft Legislation**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to render an individual, who transfers certain educational assistance, to which the individual is entitled because of an agreement by such individual to serve in the Armed Forces, to a dependent of that individual, and who fails to complete such agreement, solely liable for the overpayment of such educational assistance, and for other purposes.*

The provisions of this bill fall outside the scope of established resolutions of The American Legion. As a large grassroots organization, The American Legion takes positions on legislation based on resolutions passed by the membership or in meetings of the National Executive Committee. With no resolutions addressing the provisions of the legislation, The American Legion is researching the material and working with our membership to determine the course of action which best serves veterans.

**The American Legion has no position on this draft legislation.**

**Draft Legislation**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide certificates of eligibility and award letters to certain individuals using electronic means.*

Certificates of eligibility (COEs) are critical to veterans and the educational institutions they attend. They provide documentary evidence of a veteran's right to participate in the GI Bill educational programs. Healthcare information and eligibility are digitally available to patients across the nation. Digital access to COEs will not only inform veterans of their benefits but encourage their use as well. Likewise, veterans can easily supply educational institutions with the required documents, thus ensuring those institutions of their eligibility in the program and needed information, which will allow institutions to provide better advice to the veteran.

Years after leaving service, many veterans often don't know if they have GI Bill eligibility or how much they have. With the implementation of the Forever GI Bill, providing digital access to a copy of the COE is critical. It will ensure the veteran is aware of the status of their GI Bill benefits, create a VA record that will be available for review whenever the veteran applies for benefits (no expiration date for many), and might help provide VA contact information for eligible Veterans to allow for ongoing communications.

Through Resolution No. 318: *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education*, The American Legion supports any legislative proposal that improves the Post-9/11 GI Bill.<sup>14</sup>

**The American Legion supports this draft legislation *as currently written*.**

### **Draft Legislation**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the amount of survivors' and dependents' educational assistance provided to an eligible individual pursuing a program of education at an institution in the Republic of the Philippines.*

The American Legion was troubled to learn of a long-standing inequity in Chapter 35, Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance (DEA), limiting the educational assistance afforded to the dependents and survivors of military families pursuing higher education in the Philippines. 38 U.S. Code § 3532 section(d) states that the computation of educational benefits for the dependents and survivors of servicemembers attending an institution of higher learning in the Philippines shall be paid at the rate of \$.50 for each dollar.

The logic for this computation is based on Public Law 89-461, which was signed into law nearly fifty years ago and was meant to provide dependents and survivors with the necessary resources respective to the exchange rates between the United States and that of the government of the Philippines.<sup>15</sup> However, the current educational assistance as computed under the current law offered to survivors and dependents is inadequate in assisting dependents and survivors in their pursuit of higher education.

The American Legion believes that when one person serves, the entire family serves. Therefore, it is not our belief that we should limit educational assistance to the dependents and survivors of our nation's servicemembers, regardless of location. This revision provides the opportunity for children and spouses to take full advantage of a benefit offered to other military families worldwide and presents a more appropriate threshold for educational assistance than what is currently accommodated under the current statute.

Through Resolution No. 318: *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Students Education at Institutions of Higher Education*, The American Legion supports any legislative proposal that improves the education benefits so that servicemembers, veterans, and their families can maximize its usage.<sup>16</sup>

**The American Legion supports this draft legislation *as currently written*.**

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<sup>14</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 318 (2016): *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/470>.

<sup>15</sup> Veterans Administration Benefits Programs in the Republic of the Philippines (1977), Testimony before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, HUD-Independent Agencies Subcommittee, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress. pp.4. Gregory J. Ahart, Director, Human Resources Division, Veterans Administration.

<sup>16</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 318 (2016) *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/470>.

## **Draft Legislation – the Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans Act**

*To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a report on the Warrior Training Advancement Course, to direct the Secretary of the Interior to administer a pilot program to employ veterans in positions that relate to conservation and resource management activities of the Department of the Interior, and for other purposes.*

The *Get Rewarding Outdoor Work for our Veterans (GROW) Act* seeks for the Department of Interior to establish a two-year pilot program to employ veterans into the department's conservation and resource management positions. The American Legion has been a long-standing voice in promoting land and resource conservation. Through the formation of the Agriculture and Conservation Committee in 1950, The American Legion advocated the importance of conservation not only to assist veterans in finding gainful employment opportunities, but as a means to ensure our country's national security and welfare.<sup>17</sup>

The *GROW Act* will create a precedence for best practices to foster future employment public sector employment pipelines established by agencies and departments seeking to employ veterans and transitioning servicemembers.

Through *Resolution No. 316: Support Employment of Veterans in the Public and Private Workforce*, The American Legion supports legislative and administrative measures that encourage veteran hiring.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, this draft legislation directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit a report on the Warrior Training Advancement Course (WARTAC) to Congress. WARTAC was implemented as a pilot program between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2014 to train transitioning servicemembers into becoming Veteran Service Representatives (VSR) and Rating Veteran Service Representatives (RVSR). Since then, VA has offered VSR and RVSR positions to more than 1,400 transitioning servicemembers worldwide. Fortunately, the WARTAC program has been a success.

Effective reporting on outcomes is critical for VA to identify further internal employment needs that can be fulfilled utilizing DoD's SkillBridge authority, with WARTAC serving as a valuable best practice. This draft legislation seeks to mandate this reporting to ensure this issue is fixed. However, several provisions pose risks to practical implementation. Specifically, it calls for the report to include an element on "Best TAP Practices" with regards to WARTAC, even though the program falls under DoD's SkillBridge Program. Additionally, this legislation requires the report to include cost savings of WARTAC that include the determination of the Secretary whether other federal agencies may save money by establishing a program similar to WARTAC.

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<sup>17</sup> Jeff Stoffer. "OUR WWII STORY: GI Bill educates new era of veteran farmers." American Legion. <https://www.legion.org/honor/253832/our-wwii-story-gi-bill-educates-new-era-veteran-farmers>.

<sup>18</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 316 (2016): *Support Employment of Veterans in the Public and Private Workforce*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/468>.

Through Resolution No. 105: *Support and Expand Warrior Transition Advancement Course*, The American Legion supports expanding WARTAC. However, the language and program definitions of the legislation must correctly match the program's terms.

**The American Legion supports this draft legislation *with amendments*.**

### **Draft Legislation – the Streamlining Aviation for Eligible Veterans Act**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand certain rehabilitation programs for certain veterans with service-connected disabilities.*

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E), “Employment Through Long-Term Services,” aids veterans in overcoming their disability and employment barriers by covering the tuition and fees of education and training for the occupation they wish to pursue. However, for those who wish to pursue careers in aviation, their choices for flight schools are currently limited to programs that lead to a college degree. This poses an unnecessary barrier for veterans wishing to pursue careers in aviation because many well-paying careers in aviation only require the appropriate licensing and certification needed to verify their skills.

Currently, there exists a major skills gap for positions in the aviation industry, with The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projecting 18,400 openings for airline and commercial pilots each year over the next decade.<sup>19</sup> Aircraft and avionics mechanics face a similarly daunting shortage, with over 13,100 annual openings over the same period.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, there is a critical need to fill these positions, and this legislation would assist service-connected veterans in filling these skills gaps. Therefore, The American Legion supports the *Streamlining Aviation for Eligible Veterans Act* and applauds Congressman Obernolte's efforts to fill critical labor market gaps with service-disabled veterans.

Through Resolution No. 318: *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education*, The American Legion supports legislation that maximizes the utility of educational benefits for veterans.<sup>21</sup>

**The American Legion supports this draft legislation *as currently written*.**

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<sup>19</sup> Occupational Outlook Handbook: Airline and Commercial Pilots, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/transportation-and-material-moving/airline-and-commercial-pilots.htm#tab-6>.

<sup>20</sup> Occupational Outlook Handbook: Aircraft and Avionics Equipment Mechanics and Technicians, Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/installation-maintenance-and-repair/aircraft-and-avionics-equipment-mechanics-and-technicians.htm#tab-6>.

<sup>21</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 318 (2016): *Ensuring the Quality of Servicemember and Veteran Student's Education at Institutions of Higher Education*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/470>.

## **Draft Legislation**

*To amend title 38, United States Code to expand eligibility for a certain program of job counseling, training, and placement service for veterans.*

This draft legislation seeks to grant Transition Assistance Program (TAP) eligible servicemembers access to the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP). This program develops job and training opportunities for veterans, and places special emphasis on veterans with service-connected disabilities. Veterans benefit greatly from DVOP, as well as servicemembers preparing to transition to civilian life.

This draft legislation will expand the "eligible person" definition under Chapter 41 of Title 38, United States Code. Currently, "eligible person" under this chapter includes servicemember spouses but excludes servicemembers; this legislation will expand this definition by including members of the Armed Forces eligible for TAP. This includes everyone being discharged (regardless of the character of discharge) or released from active duty. The only exception is an individual being discharged or released before completing 180 continuous days of active duty for non-medical reasons. Creating this new category of "eligible person" will enable TAP-eligible servicemembers to be granted access to more transitional programs, including the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP).

Veterans who served this country should be given access to resources before they conclude their service. Exiting the military is not an easy task, and The American Legion believes this should be facilitated by providing servicemembers with every resource possible, including access to DVOP.

Through Resolution No. 70: *Improve Transition Assistance Program*, The American Legion support legislation that helps servicemembers have a smooth transition to civilian life.<sup>22</sup>

**The American Legion supports this draft legislation as currently written.**

## **Draft Legislation**

*To amend title 38, United States Code, to make permanent the high technology pilot program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.*

The Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) program, initially described in the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (The Forever GI Bill)<sup>23</sup> as a five-year High Technology Pilot Program, was launched in April 2019.<sup>24</sup> VET TEC connects student veterans with VA-approved training providers to acquire high-demand skills and

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<sup>22</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 70 (2016): *Improve Transition Assistance Program*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/317>.

<sup>23</sup> Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017. Library of Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3218/text>.

<sup>24</sup> Sisk, Richard. "VA to Launch New Program Aimed at Getting Vets IT Jobs." Military.Com. February 22 2019. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/02/22/va-launch-new-program-aimed-getting-vets-it-jobs.html>

certifications in-person or online, leading to gainful employment in technical areas such as Information Science, Computer Programming, and Data processing.<sup>25</sup> Unlike four-year college degree programs, VET TEC courses range between 40 and over 700 training hours. The program benefits participants by providing non-active-duty students a housing stipend and subsidized tuition by the VA while preserving veterans' GI Bill eligibility.

This draft legislation will expand the VET TEC into a permanent program. As a result, 8,000 participants stand to benefit from the program annually. The pilot program and its proposed expansion are similar in providing educational assistance, calculating performance-based funding to course providers, and delineating between regular and preferred course providers. There have been some new additions. Notably, veterans can reapply for a second program 18 months after graduating from the first; however, participants must use Post-9/11 GI Bill Chapter 33 eligibility. Protections for participants were put in place by defining what is considered a qualified provider and instructor; mandating that providers list job placement rates of program graduates and have an employer consortium; accommodating withdrawals due to military orders; and ensuring teach-out methods should a VA's contract with a course provider be terminated. Additionally, providers cannot charge additional fees to a participant that they wouldn't impose on other individuals in the cohort, and certain independent study programs have been included for approval under VET TEC. Providing economic opportunities for veterans and their families is a top priority for The American Legion. To be marketable candidates in the 21st-century workforce, veterans need training opportunities that are affordable, flexible, and applicable to their desired industries.

Addressing the gap by providing workers with reskilling and upskilling opportunities through certifications can mitigate the skills deficit by having a near-term workforce to take up available jobs.<sup>26</sup> Military training and talent are also poised to serve industry needs as servicemembers and veterans transition to the civilian sector with various technological proficiencies and soft skills that employers require.<sup>27</sup>

Through Resolution No. 23: *Support for Veterans Employment Through Technological Education Courses (VET TEC) Program Expansion*,<sup>28</sup> The American Legion supports Congress renewing the VET TEC pilot program past the sunset date and expanding it for the continued benefit of both veterans and employers.

**The American Legion supports this draft legislation *as currently written*.**

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<sup>25</sup> Veterans Technology Education Courses. Veterans Affairs. <https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/how-to-use-benefits/vettec-high-tech-program/>.

<sup>26</sup> Holtz-Eakin, Douglas. Projecting Future Skill Shortages Through 2029. American Action Forum. July 18, 2019. <https://www.americanactionforum.org/research/projecting-future-skill-shortages-through-2029/>.

<sup>27</sup> Oliver Libby. How the Military May Hold a Key to the Skills Gap Paradox. Forbes. May 9, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/oliverlibby/2019/05/09/how-the-military-may-hold-a-key-to-the-skills-gap-paradox%E2%80%A8/?sh=47781b2e4d1e>.

<sup>28</sup> The American Legion Resolution No. 23 (2022): *Support for Veterans Employment Through Technological Education Courses (VET TEC) Program Expansion*, <https://archive.legion.org/node/14061>.

## **CONCLUSION**

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, The American Legion thanks you for your leadership and for allowing us the opportunity to explain the positions of our members on the importance of these pieces of proposed legislation. Questions concerning this testimony can be directed to Mr. John Kamin, Legislative Associate at (202) 263-5748 or [jkamin@legion.org](mailto:jkamin@legion.org).