



NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
WASHINGTON, DC

September 10th, 2021

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-2604

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-2604

Dear Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Moran:

On behalf of the eleven organizations below representing veterans, service members, their families, and survivors, we write to request swift passage of legislation preserving the original intent of the Department of Veterans' Affairs' (VA) "Round Out" policy by codifying many of the flexibilities it provided students before VA's change earlier this month.

As of August 1, VA dramatically narrowed the scope and effectiveness of a long-standing practice known as the Round Out Rule.¹ Rounding out is an essential policy that allows student veterans to complete their degrees without undue financial hardship. As Fall terms begin, we are out of time to address this issue without negatively impacting student veterans, and we hope to see swift movement on this issue by the Senate.

Students enrolled in their final term before graduation using the GI Bill are eligible for VA's Round Out policy. Previously, this policy allowed a student veteran to supplement their degree-oriented courses with additional non-degree courses to retain full-time enrollment status.² This, in turn, preserved the student's full Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA). However, this policy changed effective August 1 to only allow enrollment in degree-related courses, named in the school's course catalog and not previously completed.³ These restrictions reduce the available courses for students to use for rounding out and jeopardizes their ability to use the policy at all, particularly for students at smaller schools, community colleges, or enrolled in degree programs with limited course offerings.

We understand VA decided to bring the policy in line with statutory language that authorizes only the payment of tuition and fees for degree-related courses.⁴ However, VA initially established the rounding out rule to cure a basic unfairness in how GI Bill benefit requirements could impact some student veterans in their final term, and we cannot overstate the potential negative impact this restrictive change may have on those same students going forward. Without a legislative solution, students may face significant MHA shortfalls, possibly forcing them to take out additional student loans or hope to qualify for institutional financial aid.

¹ Leo Shane III, Military Times. *VA dumps plans to stop students from adding non-degree classes to keep GI Bill benefits.* <<https://www.militarytimes.com/education-transition/2021/04/15/va-dumps-plans-to-stop-students-from-adding-non-degree-classes-to-keep-gi-bill-benefits/>>

² Department of Veterans Affairs, School Certifying Official Handbook (on-line). August 8, 2021. <https://www.knowva.ebenefits.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ssnew/help/customer/locale/en-US/portal/55440000001018/content/554400000149088/School-Certifying-Official-Handbook-On-line#Rounding%20Out>

³ Id.

⁴ Legal Information Institute, 38 U.S.C. 3452(b). <<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/38/3452#b>>



We do not believe there is a scenario in which this change leads to improved outcomes for GI Bill students. On the contrary, we believe it will increase student loan debt burdens, lower grade point averages, worsen students' physical and mental well-being, and, in some cases, could prevent or delay graduation altogether.

In addition, there has been strong disagreement with the new policy language from veterans' benefits administrators across the country. According to a survey by the National Association of Veterans' Programs Administrators (NAVPA), 76 percent do not believe the recent change will even allow the policy to work at their school, making the policy change a closure by another name.⁵

The time to act on this issue is now. As your committee continues to look at what can be done for the GI Bill during the remainder of this year, we hope this will be a top priority. We thank you for your leadership on these issues and for championing many important pieces of legislation on behalf of student veterans. Please feel free to contact Justin Monk directly if you should have any questions on this matter. He can be reached by phone at 202.223.4710 or by email at justin.monk@studentveterans.org.

Respectfully,

Student Veterans of America
American Council on Education
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Disabled American Veterans
Higher Learning Advocates
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of State Approving Agencies
National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators
Veterans of Foreign Wars

⁵ National Association of Veterans' Programs Administrators (NAVPA). Rounding Out Survey. <<https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-FL2L7YNC/>>