

October 28, 2021

U.S. Senator Jon Tester
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U. S. Senator Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Representative Mark Takano
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
B-234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Representative Mike Bost
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
B-234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, Chairman Takano, and Ranking Member Bost:

On behalf of the associations listed below, representing two- and four-year, public, and private colleges and universities, I write to urge the Committees to craft bipartisan legislation that would (1) extend COVID-related flexibilities granted to the VA; (2) provide technical corrections to address unintended consequences of recent veterans' education legislation; and (3) modify VA's "rounding out" rule to ensure that veterans can continue to receive full-time education benefits during the last term of their program. This package of fixes and extensions is desperately needed to protect veteran's education benefits from disruption and to help colleges and universities better serve veterans on campus. We respectfully ask that the Committees work to ensure that this legislation is passed through Congress, ideally by Veterans Day and, in any event, no later than the congressional Thanksgiving recess.

We strongly support both H.R. 5509, the Student Veteran COVID-19 Protection Act, and H.R. 5545, the Responsible Education Mitigating Options and Technical Extensions (REMOTE) Act. These bills are largely similar and together, provide a framework for a strong bipartisan bill that would address all three of the issues outlined above.

Both H.R. 5509 and H.R. 5545 would extend certain COVID-related flexibilities granted to the secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the wake of the pandemic. Without this extension, veterans could see their benefits reduced or cut off if, for example, their institution is forced to move instruction online due to the pandemic. Colleges and universities are working hard to keep campuses open for in-person learning this year, but already we have seen limited cases of campuses reverting to online instruction in response to evolving health conditions in their communities. Extending these provisions now will allow the secretary to make adjustments as needed and ensure that veterans' benefits are not disrupted/affected.

Both bills also include critical technical corrections to address unintended consequences stemming from several provisions in the Isakson Roe Act and the Training in High-Demand Roles to Improve Veteran Employment (THRIVE) Act. Because these provisions took effect on Aug. 1, it is critical that Congress moves quickly to address these concerns.

We are grateful to see changes that would ensure VA's incentive compensation provision is parallel to the incentive compensation provision in the Higher Education Act, and that these provisions will be interpreted consistently. We also appreciate language allowing the secretary to waive the second certification requirement for institutions with a flat rate tuition and fee structure. The bills also include language intended to help institutions satisfy the consumer information requirements contained in section 1018 of the Isakson Roe Act. While we appreciate both of these provisions, we prefer the language in H.R. 5509, which makes clear that institutions may use the Department of Education's College Financing Plan template to meet section 1018's consumer information requirements, and we urge its inclusion. These technical corrections helpfully address unintended consequences of these two recent laws while maintaining important protections for veterans and their benefits.

Finally, we urge you to include language to modify VA's current "rounding out" rule to ensure that more veterans can maintain full-time benefits during the last term of their program. Unfortunately, the current VA policy is unnecessarily restrictive in the types of coursework veterans may take to "round out" their schedules, limiting their ability to take advantage of this relief. We strongly support the "rounding out" provision in H.R. 5509, which is nearly identical to the provision contained in H.R. 2878, and urge its inclusion in the final bipartisan package. With registration for spring semester classes right around the corner, it is critical that legislation addressing this issue is swiftly enacted.

Thank you for your work on behalf of our nation's veterans. We greatly appreciate your efforts to bring together bipartisan legislation that addresses these concerns and can be quickly passed through both chambers and signed into law.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities

American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Council on Education
Association of American Universities
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public Land-grant Universities
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Council of Graduate Schools
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association