



VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS

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SENATE PASSES CAREER READY STUDENT VETERANS ACT

Legislation Headed to President's Desk

WASHINGTON, D.C. – [Veterans Education Success](#) (VES) today hailed the U.S. Senate's unanimous passage in the early hours of December 10, 2016, of the [Career Ready Student Veterans Act](#), a bill VES proposed, helped draft, and pushed for, throughout 2015 and 2016. The U.S. House of Representatives had previously passed the bill, also unanimously, on February 9, 2016.

"In unanimous votes, every member of Congress agreed that veterans should be protected from education programs that are a waste of their time and their hard-earned GI Bill benefits," VES Policy Director Walter Ochinko said. **"With passage of this provision, degree programs that lack the accreditation needed for graduates to sit for licensure exams or obtain certifications won't be eligible to participate in the GI Bill."**

The bill solves a problem that VES policy director, Walter Ochinko, carefully documented in a 2015 report, ["The GI Bill Pays For Degrees That Do Not Lead to a Job,"](#) which found that 20% of 300 programs that were approved for GI Bill to train students for jobs in licensed occupations were, in fact, improperly accredited such that graduates were not eligible to even sit for required licensing exams or certification, and could not get hired in their promised field of study. The [report](#) documented examples of improperly accredited programs in licensed occupations, such as nursing and law, which were approved for the GI Bill, violating common sense and wasting veterans' time and their hard-earned GI Bill benefits. The [report](#) identified 8 programs of study, offered at 60 campuses by 15 different schools (both online and brick and mortar) that left graduates ineligible to work. These programs failed to meet employer or state requirements, leaving the graduates ineligible to work in their field of study. All in all, these amounted to 20%

of VA-approved programs in such licensed occupations examined by VES. Ochinko [presented](#) his report to the House Veterans Affairs Committee in June 2015 and [testified](#) about the report before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Members in September 2015.

“These unanimous votes prove that common sense can prevail in Washington,” said Veterans Education Success President Carrie Wofford. **“Every Member of Congress voted to end the ridiculous practice of approving GI Bill for improperly accredited programs. Accreditation matters, especially when it comes to training veterans for jobs that require a license or certification.”**

Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA), Acting Ranking Member of the U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee, and an original sponsor of the bill, said: **“The *Career Ready Student Veterans Act* is an important step toward ensuring that every veteran gets the most out of their GI Bill benefits. I'm grateful that Congress acted on a bipartisan basis to protect student veterans from schools that often leave them in crippling debt and with few job opportunities. There is still significant work we must do to defend the GI Bill from schools that fail to meet students' needs. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the next Congress to address this challenge, which affects thousands of veterans every year.”**

Sen. Tom Tillis (R-NC), a member of the U.S. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and an original sponsor of the bill, said: **“Our veterans risked their lives to protect our freedoms as Americans. This good-faith policy ensures they earn an education that will help them enter the civilian workforce and provide the opportunity to seek employment that will put them on a path toward a successful career. I am proud to work with Senator Blumenthal to ensure GI Bill education benefits are put toward accredited continuing education programs. Our nation's heroes deserve only the best.”**

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-NC), Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and an original sponsor of the bill, said: **“Federal funding for substandard education programs is a disservice to veterans as well as taxpayers. Our nation's heroes deserve the best—not the dregs of the American education system. This provision in the landmark Miller-Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act will help protect veterans from slick pitches that lure them into squandering GI Bill benefits on worthless degrees from unaccredited education programs – helping them pursue legitimate education and employment opportunities.”**

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), a member of the U.S. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and an original sponsor of the bill, said, **“The passage of this legislation will help ensure that our veterans are receiving the best possible educational programs as they prepare for their future outside of the military. Our veterans deserve the best. Let's make sure they are getting the best.”**

Included in the 2015 VES report were testimonials from veterans who found out after the fact that their degrees did not lead to a job:

"I was told when I attended [Colorado Technical University in 2013] that any [police] department would accept their degree. Upon asking someone I knew that worked for the Georgia Department of Corrections, I was informed they do not and that they only accepted degrees from traditionally accredited universities."

"I was assured [by Colorado Technical University] that everything was correct and I'd get my degree [in medical billing and coding]. They said they are accredited which is how the GI Bill is paying for it. During my LAST class for my associates degree, I found out that we can't get certified in a few different levels including the highest level which is actually required by most major medical facilities. It's a useless degree."

"I could have tried to transfer, but I had heard from many sources that [Concord School of Law at Kaplan University] credits rarely transferred. The most important bit of knowledge I gained during this time was from a one-term adjunct instructor, who, when I told her of my plan to continue my education through Concord Law School, informed me that the school was not recognized in Iowa for taking the Bar exam. That information was eye opening. The Dean apparently didn't know or forgot to mention this little problem with Concord."

The *Career Ready Student Veterans Act* amends Chapter 36 of Title 38 to require both accredited and non-accredited programs that are designed to prepare an individual for licensure or certification in a state to meet any instructional curriculum licensure or certification requirements of the state in order to be approved for purposes of VA education benefits. It would also require programs designed to prepare an individual for employment pursuant to standards developed by a board or agency of a state in an occupation that requires approval or licensure to be approved or licensed by the board or agency of the state, in order to be approved for purposes of VA education benefits. It would also require that any course of education designed to prepare a student for licensure to practice law be accredited by a recognized party. It would add a new subsection (f) to Section 3676, providing that the Secretary would be authorized to waive either of those requirements in certain circumstances and would add specific criteria for disapproving such courses in Section 3679 of Title 38. This section would not apply to individuals continuously enrolled in a course if that course is later disapproved pursuant to this section.

The *Career Ready Student Veterans Act* also brings the GI Bill into alignment with the Tuition Assistance program at the U.S. Department of Defense, which operates under a similar [requirement](#), 10 U.S.C. 2006a, signed into law Dec. 26, 2013, as section 541 of the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act.

The *Career Ready Student Veterans Act* was passed as part of a larger package of 76 bipartisan provisions to improve veterans' education, health, disability, and claims processing entitled the *Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016* ([H.R.6416](#)). This larger package of bills incorporates language from a number of previously introduced House and Senate bills, including several provisions from the *Veterans First Act*, which unanimously passed the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs in May 2016. A section-by-section summary of the H.R.6416 is available [here](#). The *Career Ready Student Veterans Act* is section 409 of H.R. 6416.

Regarding the larger package of bills, U.S. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-GA) said in a [statement](#) released by his office: **“I am proud that the Senate has acted on this legislation to help our veterans. Regardless of political party, we are showing our veterans that we are on the same team when it comes to getting things right for them. With today’s vote, we are demonstrating our commitment to ensuring that our veterans receive what was promised to them and their families. This legislation will improve veterans’ access to health care and benefits and is an important down payment on the debt that we owe to the veterans of the United States of America.”**

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