

# TESTIMONY FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REGARDING GAINFULL EMPLOYMENT AND BORROWER'S DEFENSE RULES

Presented by Heather Donnithorne, Manager of Special Projects,  
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Good Afternoon

Thank you for providing this opportunity to speak to you today on the issue of gainful employment regulation revision and the delay of borrower defense protections and reimbursement.

My name is Heather Donnithorne and I am with Blue Star Families. Through our membership of 150,000 plus members worldwide we touch more than 1.5 million military families every year. Through our annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey we hear their voices, we share their stories, and then we work to advocate for and broker solutions to the challenges they face.

I am here today to do just that; to be the voice for military spouses and college aged military dependents. Having said that, I will must also add that I am an Air Force military spouse myself and before the Air Force swept me away I had a career in Higher Education for 13 years. In each of these facets I have seen firsthand how “bad actor” schools have harmed military families.

You see, it isn't just the veterans who receive GI Bill funds. In our 2016 annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey with over 8,000 respondents, 75% reported that they had, or planned to, transfer the GI Bill benefit to a dependent (spouse or child).

It is no secret that the 90/10 loophole make that GI Bill money attractive to for-profit schools. And because military families are frequently moving, and because we live in a time when dual-income households are essential to financial security and the ability for families to thrive, we have found that military spouses often seek out the certification and quick degree programs for-profit (many of them online) schools offer. Research backs this up: 4 of the top 5 reported military spouse careers are certification and licensure employment in health care, education, administrative, financial, and business services. This all culminates into a perfect storm: military spouses and dependents are an easy target for the predatory colleges who market promised career opportunities in the very fields military spouses seek to find employment.

I'd love to share several of our members' stories with you, but with only five minutes, I will share just one. Ms. Meadows is one of our Blue Star Families military spouses. She is currently in Montgomery, Alabama. Her husband is Active Duty. She is unable to work in the career field she sought certification in since 2014. Ms. Meadows shared with me that she is in debt to the tune of \$15,000 plus for a national certification as Medical Assistant from Fortis College. Despite fulfilling all the requirements of the program, her certification is not recognized as valid, therefore employers will not hire her. Not only did Fortis College put her in debt with nothing to show for it, they also applied her MYCAA scholarship (for military spouses whose Active Duty spouse is in the earlier stages of their military career) and GI Bill funds to the cost of the training. Those are benefits she cannot get back and significant monies that are lost.

So here is what I have to say in a nutshell. The families of our All-Volunteer force make unprecedented sacrifices as it is. One of the benefits that eases the sacrifice is being targeted. Military families should not have to experience any of this in order to fulfill their personal goals and/or to financially contribute to the essential and vital dual-income family lifestyle that they

live. More importantly though, should they suffer hardship at the hands of a predatory education experience, they should not, for any reason, suffer long delays and confusing appeal processes in order to correct it. Furthermore, borrower protections and gainful employment provisions that address this issue on the front-end are 100% necessary. The rules and provisions that exist today must be implemented; not today, or tomorrow, but yesterday.

Thank you.