



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## Fact Sheet

Office of Public Affairs  
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### **Potential Suspension of GI Bill Benefits for Enrollment at Ashford University**

While the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has acknowledged the authority of the Arizona State Approving Agency (SAA) to approve Ashford University's (Ashford) online programs for VA education benefits under the various GI Bill chapters, the Department believes that the approval is legally insufficient because the Arizona SAA lacks jurisdiction to approve Ashford. The legal authority to approve Ashford rests solely with the SAA of the state where Ashford's main campus is located. It does not appear to VA that Ashford's main campus is located in Arizona. If Ashford fails to get approved by the SAA for the state in which its main campus is located in the next 60 days, VA will be forced to suspend payments to beneficiaries in order to for VA to comply with Federal laws and regulations.

- Ashford's closure of its Iowa residential campus (and the relocation of its main campus to California) resulted in the Iowa SAA's withdrawal of approval of Ashford's online programs for VA benefits.
- Ashford applied to Arizona for approval to receive education benefits even though its main campus is not located in Arizona.
- The Arizona SAA's approval of Ashford's online programs does not fully comply with approval requirements and, consequently, VA is required to terminate benefit payments to GI Bill beneficiaries until such time as the school obtains an approval from the SAA of the state of its main campus.

VA issued a 60-day cure notice on November 9, 2017, to Ashford in a final attempt to allow the school time to become compliant with the law. If, by the end of this 60-day period, Ashford has corrected the deficiencies, VA will take no action and beneficiaries will not see a disruption of their GI Bill benefits.

#### **Key Facts**

- VA depends on SAAs to exercise their **exclusive** authority to approve programs at educational institutions in their respective states – VA does not hold this authority.
  - VA regulations state that online programs must be approved at a school's main campus. Based on the evidence of record (e.g., accreditation, licensure, school publications, etc.), Ashford's main campus is located in California.
  - At this time, Ashford has not elected to pursue approval in California.
  - Ashford online programs are not currently approvable in Iowa or Arizona for the same reasons.
- VA remains committed to working with Ashford and the California SAA to become compliant with laws and regulations governing approval for GI Bill benefits.
  - VA has worked with Ashford and the SAAs in Iowa, California, and Arizona, and their respective Attorneys General
  - VA acknowledged an approval by the Arizona SAA and assigned a facility code to Ashford in that state because statute does not allow us to ignore such approvals.
- VA understands this required action may cause financial hardship and encourages students to contact us with questions or reach out to a Veterans Service Organization (VSO).

- VA looks to VSOs to help support students during this process as Veterans and other GI Bill beneficiaries could be negatively impacted while this process plays out.
- VA aims to help students pursue and achieve their educational goals, and strongly urges Ashford to do the right thing for GI Bill students.

