

November 18, 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

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
B-234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Bost
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
B-234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

On behalf of the 34 organizations below representing veterans, service members, their families, and survivors, two- and four-year, public, and private colleges and universities at home and abroad, we write to you regarding H.R. 5545, the *Responsible Education Mitigating Options and Technical Extensions, or REMOTE Act*. We appreciate the work you and your staff have done in crafting a bill that addresses most of the policy issues we have raised with the Committees over many months. However, we are deeply concerned by the bill's failure to include a desperately-needed correction to the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) recently reworked 'rounding out' rule. We are equally concerned by the failure to bring this time-sensitive package to the floor prior to the Thanksgiving recess and that a bipartisan, bicameral path forward remains elusive at this late date. We urge the committees to come together to move this legislation forward so it can be swiftly enacted into law.

H.R. 5545 includes important provisions to extend certain COVID-19-related flexibilities and ensure that veterans' benefits are not negatively impacted during the spring semester should an in-person program need to convert to online. The bill also contains important technical corrections to the recent Isakson-Roe legislation. For example, the legislation would restore the foreign student recruitment exception to the incentive compensation provisions, and once again assure that the VA and the Department of Education are consistent in their interpretation of these provisions.

Unfortunately, H.R. 5545 currently omits language to address the VA's rounding out rule changes, which has been included in both H.R. 5509, the *Student Veteran COVID-19 Protections Act* and H.R. 2878, the *Native Vet Success at Tribal Colleges and Universities Pilot Program Act*, which passed the House in May but remains stalled in the Senate. Without the 'rounding out' fix, these students will be forced into making life-altering decisions, such as abruptly relocating, taking on additional work or a new job, or accumulating even more debt through student loans, that will undoubtedly impact their ability to complete their studies.

We strongly urge you to include the rounding out language from either H.R. 5509 or H.R. 2878, which are nearly identical, to ensure that more student veterans can maintain full-time benefits during the last term of their program. Because registration for spring semester classes is already underway at most campuses, it is critical that legislation addressing this issue is swiftly enacted to prevent further harm to student veterans.

In addition to this change, we strongly encourage the Committees to come to an agreement about how to address the bill's approximate \$200 million cost. The veteran-serving and higher education communities would be supportive of passage of these provisions using either emergency spending or an offset. However, without a clear plan to resolve the pay-for differences between the parties, and given the abbreviated timeline with which Congress has left to pass these desperately needed protections, it is imperative that the four corners come together and find a solution now to allow this important legislation to quickly pass the House under suspension and the Senate under unanimous consent.

To be clear, the veteran-serving and higher education communities are uninterested in moving forward House legislation that fails to address all three of the time-sensitive issues at hand or that cannot quickly pass both chambers. In short, our collective position remains the same today as it has for the past several months: students and institutions need bipartisan legislation that can move swiftly through both chambers and be signed quickly into law, and it is up to the committees to forge a path forward.

The committees' primary opportunity to act to prevent future harm to students passed on August 1st, 2021, and the next was before Thanksgiving, meaning the corrective actions within this bill are already long overdue. As your committees discuss the temporary COVID-19 protections package, we hope that the immediate needs of student veterans and educational institutions will take priority over the funding mechanism. 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 Land-grant Universities
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
AMVETS
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of the United States Navy
Career Education Colleges and Universities
Colorado Advisory Council on Military Education (CO-ACME)
Committee on Military Transition to Education (CMTE)
Council of College and Military Educators
Council of Graduate Schools
Florida Advisory Council on Military Education (FL-ACME)
Florida Association of Veterans Education Specialists (FAVES)
Higher Learning Advocates
International Education Council
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 State Approving Agencies
National Association of Student Financial Aid Officers
National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators (NAVPA)
New York Hudson Valley Consortium on Veteran and Military Affiliated Education
Non Commissioned Officers Association
Special Operations Association of America
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
TREA: The Enlisted Association
Veterans Education Project
Virginia Association of School Certifying Officials (VASCO)