

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 14, 2010

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Council on Education and the organizations listed below, we write to express our hope that before adjournment, the 111th Congress will approve a final version of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvement Act of 2010 that addresses the concerns outlined below.

Both the House version (H.R. 6430) and the Senate version (S. 3447) make welcome improvements to current law, such as expanding the benefits to troops serving in the Active Guard Reserve and to National Guard members who have honorably served their country on active duty, including at the sites of natural disasters. The bills also replace the complex state-by-state tuition and fee cap look-up chart with language that specifies that GI Bill benefits cover tuition and fees for veterans attending public institutions while establishing a single national tuition baseline for those who enroll in private institutions.

However, we believe that the House version is preferable in two very critical respects. First, S. 3447 contains a provision that would add a new source of confusion for veterans and prevent them from having a clear idea of the level of support to which they are entitled. This so-called “last-payer” provision, which withholds the GI Bill benefit until a calculation is made of any state and private tuition aid for which a veteran may be eligible, would not only confound veterans and delay the delivery of aid, but in some cases would conflict with state statutes. In contrast, H.R. 6430 does not include such a provision and will help end the frustration and confusion that far too many veterans have experienced in attempting to access their benefits.

Second, H.R. 6430 includes an important “hold harmless” provision, designed to protect veterans who might otherwise be negatively impacted by the establishment of a national baseline. In several states, veterans attending private institutions currently receive a base benefit that is greater than the new national baseline amount provided in either version of the legislation. By failing to include this “hold harmless” language, the Senate bill would reduce benefits for a number of veterans upon enrollment for a subsequent term. In contrast, the House bill would help ensure that veterans continue to receive their current benefits without interruption.

As this legislation nears passage, we strongly urge you to modify S. 3447 so that it reflects the approach taken by the House bill on these two important issues. Our campuses have worked very hard to smooth out the difficulties that veterans have faced under current law, and these improvements will enable them to serve veterans even more effectively.

Thank you for all of your work on behalf of the nation's veterans.

Sincerely,



Molly Corbett Broad
President

MCB/lw

On behalf of:

American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
Association of American Universities
Association of Community College Trustees
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Council for Opportunity in Education
Council of Graduate Schools
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators