



Reserve Officers Association of the United States

Statement for the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee

**Hearing on
Pending Legislation**

June 15, 2017

"Serving Citizen Warriors through Advocacy and Education since 1922."™

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The Reserve Officers Association of the United States (ROA) is a professional association of commissioned, non-commissioned and warrant officers of our nation's seven uniformed services. ROA was founded in 1922 by General of the Armies John "Black Jack" Pershing during the drawdown years following the end of World War I. It was formed as a permanent institution dedicated to national defense, with a goal to inform America regarding the dangers of unpreparedness. Under ROA's 1950 congressional charter, our purpose is to promote the development and execution of policies that will provide adequate national defense. We do so by developing and offering expertise on the use and resourcing of America's Reserve Components.

The association's members include Reserve and Guard Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen who frequently serve on active duty to meet critical needs of the uniformed services. ROA's membership also includes commissioned officers from the United States Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who often are first responders during national disasters and help prepare for homeland security.

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DISCLOSURE OF FEDERAL GRANTS OR CONTRACTS

The Reserve Officers Association is a member-supported organization. ROA has not received grants, contracts, or subcontracts from the federal government in the current or previous two fiscal years by the witness or by ROA. All other activities and services of the associations are accomplished free of any direct federal funding. Additionally, ROA has not made payments to or contracted with a foreign government in the current and preceding two calendar years.

STATEMENT

ROA has a membership of 50,000 and is the only national military association that exclusively supports all 1,085,155 Ready Reserve members of the Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve. We appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on the proposed bills related to the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. The bills or sections that affect the Reserve Components are addressed by ROA. The additional bills, not included in this statement, have merit and will be or have been addressed by other Veteran or Military Service Organizations.

Proposed Legislation

S. 410, Shauna Hill Post 9/11 Education Benefits Transferability Act, to authorize the transfer of unused Post-9/11 Educational Assistance benefits to additional dependents upon the death of the originally designated dependent.

ROA views this as a technical change that is required.

S.473, Educational Development for Troops and Veterans Act of 2017, to make qualification requirements for entitlement to Post-9/11 Education Assistance more equitable, to improve support of veterans receiving such educational assistance.

ROA appreciates the proposed sections that bring 12304a and 12304b in line with other deployment authorities. Additionally, we believe support of Veteran Student Centers is necessary since veteran students are non-traditional students. Veterans have different needs than those who went straight from high school to college and are 18-23 years old. According to VA:

- Only 15% of Student Veterans are traditionally aged college students (18-23). Most are between the ages of 24 and 40
- 47% of Student Veterans have children
- 47.3% of Student Veterans are married

S.758, Janey Ensminger Act of 2017, to amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's review and publication of illness and conditions relating to veterans stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and their family members.

ROA supports this effort to more closely monitor the toxic exposure. Additionally, we believe a national toxic register must be established for individuals to self-identify toxic exposure. This way data can be compiled earlier in the cycle of service-connected medical conditions to determine health problems resulting from exposure. This will ultimately be more cost effective than relying on "presumptive conditions" decades after exposure.

S.844, GI Bill Fairness Act of 2017, to consider certain time spent by members of reserve components of the Armed Forces while receiving medical care from the Secretary of Defense as active duty for purposes of eligibility for Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, and for other purposes.

This bill would include service provided under 10 United States Code, Section 12301(h), for individuals receiving medical care. It would enable them to receive education

benefits just as their Active Component counterparts do today. ROA agrees with the Reserve Forces Policy Board which stated, *“If the member is not discharged because of the injury and instead returns to service - either deployed or as a Selected Reservist - none of the time spent in recovery is considered qualifying time. The service member would earn less qualifying time than those who served the entire time without an injury, and would not receive an equal benefit. In effect, this service member is penalized for being wounded or injured in theater. Ironically, if that same member was discharged from service because of the injury, the member would earn 100% of the benefit (assuming 30 days of continuous active duty service).”*.

S.882, provides for the entitlement to educational assistance under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs for members of the Armed Forces awarded the Purple Heart.

ROA supports this change and believe these individuals have provided a service to our country that deserves this benefit.

S.1192, Veterans TEST Accessibility Act, to provide for pro-rated charges to entitlement to educational assistance under Department of Veterans Affairs Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program for certain licensure and certification tests and national tests, and for other purposes.

We support legislation that would be based on actual costs, especially when it would save the servicemember a portion of their education entitlement.

S.1209, to increase the amount of special pension for Medal of Honor recipients.

ROA supports this change and believes these individuals have provided a service to our country that deserves this benefit and is more reflective of past cost of living increases.

S.1218, Empowering FED Vets Act, to promote Federal employment for veterans.

ROA urges Congress to change the Federal Hiring Preference standards for National Guard and Reserve members from “180 consecutive days” to “180 cumulative days”. This would fulfil the intent of the bill to “enhance employment opportunities” by extending it to the Reserve Component. It has been found that unemployment contributes to the high suicide rate in the RC. By the end of 2016 123 National Guard and 80 Reserve servicemembers were lost to suicide—one person every two days.

S.1277, Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses Act of 2017 (VET TEC Act of 2017), to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a high technology education pilot program.

This bill would apply to certificate programs that provide instruction in computer programming, computer software, media application, data processing, or information sciences. It would help National Guard and Reserve members, as veterans, who are not always eligible for tuition assistance programs because they are not on active duty in a full-time status. Additionally, the services would get the benefit of Reserve Component members maintaining certificates while still performing military duty.

Additional Proposals by Section Number

Sec. 2. Consolidation of certain eligibility tiers under the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of Department of Veterans Affairs. This would increase the lower tiers from 40 percent to 50 percent and 50 percent to 60 percent.

We support this change because it reduces out-of-pocket tuition for the National Guard and Reserve. This takes into consideration that they provide operational support on an “as needed” basis to the services and often never earn the entire 36 months of entitlement.

Sec. 3. Additional Post-9/11 Educational Assistance for certain individuals pursuing programs of education in science, technology, engineering, math, or health care.

This proposal could be setting a precedent for other degree programs to seek additional education benefits. With that as a possibility, Congress should amend the bill so that individuals who qualify for these benefits thereby incur a service commitment to the National Guard or Reserve. This approach is in keeping with the intent of the G.I. Bill being an earned entitlement. Additionally, there is a direct benefit to the federal government to help fill critical vacancies.

CONCLUSION

The Reserve Components bring essential capabilities to the total force. Adequately resourced, as they have since the Guard's advent in the 17th century, Citizen-Soldiers provide our nation a unique and affordable augmentation of its military capability. We appreciate the committee considering legislation that positively affects the National Guard and Reserve, as well as, family members who support their efforts.