



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE APPROVING
AGENCIES**

On

Pending Education Benefits Legislation

1st Session, 115th Congress

SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

May 17, 2017

STATEMENT OF DR. JOSEPH WESCOTT
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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE APPROVING AGENCIES
FOR THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
CONCERNING
PENDING LEGISLATION
May 17, 2017

CHAIRMAN ISAKSON, RANKING MEMBER TESTER, and Members of the Committee, the National Association of State Approving Agencies (NASAA) is pleased to provide its views on certain education benefits legislation under consideration by the Committee today, May 17, 2017, particularly S. 764.

NASAA does not receive any grants or contracts directly from the federal government, though its member organizations are state agencies operating in whole or in part under federal contracts funded by Congress and administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

On behalf of fifty-two State approving agencies (SAAs), including the territory of Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, NASAA thanks the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs for its strong commitment to a better future for all service members, veterans and their families through its continued support of the GI Bill® educational program.

S. 764, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the enrollment of veterans in certain courses of education, and for other purposes.

State approving agencies take seriously our role as “the gatekeepers of quality” and the “boots on the ground” defending the integrity of the GI Bill and making sure that only quality programs are approved by applying federal and state law and regulation. An additional and equally important role is the continued oversight of these programs after their initial approval. We do so in conjunction with other stakeholders in veteran organizations and higher education, including state licensing agencies, state higher education departments, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Education and national and regional accrediting agencies.

We also seek to encourage our approved institutions to provide resources and policies which will help guarantee the success of our veteran students once they enroll in an SAA approved program. Congress, in establishing the laws and regulations governing the manner and method by which education could be approved for veterans, has wisely provided that the States, through their State approving agencies are best situated and staffed to evaluate and oversee educational programming being considered for approval and being continued for GI Bill payment. Certainly, it is not inappropriate for Congress to consider establishing, as a part of requirements for approval that

educational institutions will extend to veterans the same priority registration rights that they provided to other groups or classes of students within their institutions. However, we think that given the consequences of failing to do so (i.e. none of the institutions programs can be approved for reimbursement under the GI Bill), it is important that Congress allow the institutions maximum control over how the priority enrollment policy is implemented. For instance, the following wording “the Secretary or a State approving agency may not approve a program of education offered by such institution unless such institution allows a covered individual to enroll in courses at the earliest possible time pursuant to such priority enrollment system,” should be amended to allow institutions to implement this requirement in such a way that veterans would not compete for classes with students from other earlier class years. Likewise, since some schools will need time to implement this on their campuses, we would suggest that schools, which are already approved and have priority registration systems in place, be given adequate time to respond to the new approval requirements.

Finally, we would point out the recent legislation enacted by Congress recognizes the primary role played by State approving agencies in the area of program approval. As such we would request that Congress change the wording of 3680B (a) to read, “ a State approving agency, or the Secretary when acting in the absence of a State approving agency, may not approve...”

Given the fact that many leading institutions of education, particularly accredited public institutions of higher learning (IHLs), are already offering student veterans priority enrollment, we don't think that it is unreasonable to require that educational institutions offering this privilege to other student groups on their campus provide it to veterans as well.

For the reasons cited above, NASAA respectfully requests that the language of this bill be changed so that the manner and method of offering priority enrollment to veterans will not impede the graduation / progress of those students in classes senior to them. Likewise, we suggest the insertion of an effective date to allow already approved institutions time to develop and implement this requirement. Finally, the primary role of the States in the approval of programs should be protected and reflected in the language of the bill. With those amendments, NASAA supports this bill.

Today, SAAs throughout our nation, composed of approximately 175 professional and support personnel, are supervising over 10,000 active facilities with 100,000 programs. We pledge to you that we will not fail in our critical mission and in our commitment to safeguard the public trust, to protect the GI Bill and to defend the future of those who have so nobly defended us. Mr. Chairman, NASAA thanks the Committee for the opportunity to share our concerns and suggestions and we commit to working together with you and your staff to enhance the pending legislation.

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Joseph W. Wescott II (Joe) was appointed Legislative Director of the National Association of State Approving Agencies in August 2015. Previous to that, he served four years as NASAA President and Vice President, while simultaneously working on the NASAA Legislative Committee. Wescott was appointed Executive Director of the North Carolina State Approving Agency (NCSAA) in Raleigh North Carolina on September 14, 2009 by the UNC System Board of Governors, at the recommendation of then system president Erskine Bowles. The fourth Executive Director since the agency was established in 1947; Dr. Wescott had previously served three years as an agency program specialist. As Executive Director, he oversees over 400 institutions of higher education and training throughout North Carolina ensuring quality educational programming and job training for veterans and their eligible dependents.

Prior to his appointment, Wescott served in various leadership roles in higher education including director of the office of Planning, Policy and Evaluation at Brunswick Community College, federal relations analyst/government relations representative for Duke University and an adjunct instructor at several colleges and professional organizations. Dr. Wescott is a veteran, having served on active duty as a combat officer in the US Army. Earlier, he attended Wake Forest University on a four year Army ROTC scholarship, graduating with honors. He holds advanced degrees from Wake Forest University and North Carolina State University, including the doctorate in Higher Education Administration. In addition to other duties, Wescott serves as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Leadership, Policy, Adult and Higher Education at NC State University. He serves on numerous national boards and state committees, including the NASAA Executive Board, NC Proprietary Schools Advisory Board, and the Governor's Working Group on Veterans, Service Members and their Families.

Dr. Wescott resides in Raleigh, NC and has written several articles and books on history and higher education topics including the history of the North Carolina Community College system.