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TESTIMONY OF  
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BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:

"S. 3021 - A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the use of Post-9/11 Education Assistance to pursue independent study programs at certain educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning"

June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016



Chairman Johnny Isakson, Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal and members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America (SVA) to submit our written testimony on “S. 3021 – A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the use of Post-9/11 Education Assistance to pursue independent study programs at certain educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning”. With over 1,300 chapters across the country, we are pleased to share the perspective of those most directly impacted by this subject with this committee.

Established in 2008, SVA has grown to become a force and voice for the interests of veterans in higher education. With a myriad of programs supporting their success, rigorous research development seeking ways to improve the landscape, and advocacy throughout the nation, we place the student veteran at the top of our organizational pyramid. As the future leaders of this country, nothing is more paramount than their success in school to prepare them for productive and impactful lives.

SVA’s top priorities include accelerating veteran success in institutes of higher learning through better access to information on institutes of higher learning, financial aid, pathways to degrees, clear understanding of transfer credits from service to college, articulation agreements between community colleges and four year colleges and universities, understanding application and recruitment to institutes of higher learning, and much more.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss S. 3021 and will explain SVA’s stance on the amendment including recommended changes to S. 3021. Our overall goal is to protect the Post 9/11 GI Bill from fraud and abuse while keeping this benefit available to those veterans who are attempting to obtain a degree in higher education.

**Changes to S. 3021:**

“(C) to a certificate that reflects completion of a course of study offered by—

“(i) an area career and technical education school (as defined in section 3 of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2302)) that provides education at the postsecondary level; or

“(ii) a postsecondary vocational institution (as defined in section 102(c) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1002(c))) that provides education at the postsecondary level.”.

**S. 3021 – A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the use of Post-9/11 Education Assistance to pursue independent study programs at certain educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning:**

Student Veterans of America understands the intent of the amendment to Chapter 38 but would like to caution the overarching implications if this change were applied. In the past SVA has seen well-intended alterations to the GI Bill abused by less than reputable institutions of higher learning. The result being the Corinthian College collapse and the current ITT Technical Institute debacle. This change, would allow less than reputable non-profit



institutions to use the Post 9/11 GI Bill in a manner that is not intended by the amendment. Specifically, this amendment allows institutions little to no oversight in degree programs that do not lead to diplomas or certificates. While SVA does see a need for independent study programs we currently does not see the proper oversight in how the Post 9/11 GI Bill is administered for these programs. Deregulation of the already existing guidelines would be detrimental in the overall effectiveness of the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

Additionally, Student Veterans of America is concerned by subsection (C)(i): the Perkins Act does not require an institution to be accredited or authorized at a State level. Accreditation of programs are essential in determining the quality of education an institution delivers. Without proper oversight, the ability for fraud is possible. Lastly, the Perkins Act leaves the possibility to use the Post 9/11 GI Bill for entrepreneurship actives that are not degree seeking programs. This is something that SVA has opposed in the past and will continue to oppose in the future.

Any change in deregulating the Post 9/11 GI Bill opens the door to fraud. It is our goal to protect the intent of the Post 9/11 GI Bill while still making it available to those who need to use the Bill in a non-traditional way. This change, although well intended, opens the door for abusive institutions to pray on veterans while offering degrees worth less than the paper they are printed on. Because of this, we cannot support the amendment to Chapter 38. Student Veterans of America would support the amendment if changes were made to the amendment.

We strongly suggest the following changes to S. 3021 be made to insure the integrity of the Post 9/11 GI Bill:

- Do not allow schools that are currently under investigation for fraud or deceptive practices to participate in the use of the Post 9/11 GI Bill in this manner.
- State Approving Agencies (SAA) should be the leading approval agency when deciding if an institution/program would be eligible to receive the Post 9/11 GI Bill for an independent study program.
- If this change applies to non-profit or private institution then *require* the Veterans Affairs to act as an approving agency and authorize the VA to use their discretion in revoking the use of the GI Bill at that institution. This is particularly important in areas with no SAA.
- Recommend the ability to use the Post 9/11 GI Bill in this method only be applicable to public institutions; not private, non-profit, or for-profit institutions.

Student Veterans of America's goal is to protect the Post 9/11 GI Bill from abusive practices. Regulations are in place to insure that the GI Bill will remain for future generations. Unfortunately, too many instances of malpractice have led to the need of strict regulations of how one can use the Post 9/11 GI Bill. The proposed amendment to S. 3021 could be used in a less than reputable manner. Because of this, we recommend the above changes before SVA supports the Bill.

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the subcommittee members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans in higher education. As always, we welcome your feedback and questions, and we look forward to continuing to work with this subcommittee, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and the entire Congress to ensure the success of all generations of veterans through education.



**Derek Fronabarger**

**Director of Policy, Student Veterans of America**



Derek Fronabarger joined the professional staff of Student Veterans of America in February 2016 as the Director of Policy. Derek graduated from the College of Charleston with a B.A. in Philosophy and received an M.B.A with a concentration in International Business from the Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina. Prior to SVA, Derek worked on the Joining Forces Initiative at the White House in the Office of the First Lady.

Prior to receiving his education, Derek served in the United States Army as an Air Defense Intelligence Tactical Operator where he served overseas in Germany, Israel, and Afghanistan. He served in both the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division during deployments. Derek's understanding of the importance of education is what led him to SVA. Being a beneficiary of the GI Bill, Derek intends to use his firsthand knowledge of the benefits it entails to provide current and future student veterans with knowledge of the resources available to them when transitioning from service to school.