

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 14, 2025

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins:

With the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Benefits Administration offices once again open and funded, we write to express alarm about VA failing to pay out required education benefits to thousands of veterans, their families, and survivors. These payment failures are not merely a bureaucratic inconvenience; they are a direct failure to uphold the sacred promises made to those who served our country. The fact that payments for essential housing and tuition benefits have been delayed for nearly four months, forcing student veterans and survivors into financial instability and uncertainty as they began a new academic term, is simply unacceptable.

We have serious concerns with the exponential increase in the number of student veterans, their families, survivors, and educational institutions impacted by severe delays in payments of VA educational programs benefits. Our offices have heard directly from veterans, families, and schools of delays in payments for beneficiaries using Dependent Educational Assistance (DEA), Veteran Readiness and Employment, and Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits. During an update provided to Congress in August 2025, VA indicated that 750 individuals were experiencing delays in payments. However, VA recently shared with schools that there are now 75,000 DEA beneficiaries impacted by delayed payments. This inexplicable hundredfold increase is alarming, and we urge you to take quick action to address the rapidly-growing backlog and ensure the delivery of payments to these beneficiaries as soon as possible.

We expect your overdue answer to the questions posed in our October 9th, 2025, letter no later than December 3rd, 2025, in time to inform the Economic Subcommittee's upcoming hearing on this Administration's failure to pay 75,000 Chapter 35 DEA education benefits in a timely manner. **We also expect that VA will conduct the October 1st, 2025, Congressional briefing that VA canceled with no notice before November 27th, 2025.** Additionally, we request an **immediate action plan** from VA detailing the scope of those impacted, how VA is going to make them whole, timeline for a resolution of both the 75,000-case backlog for Chapter 35 and delayed Post-9/11 GI Bill payments, and how VA will be preventing any recurrence of this failure in the future.

VA's own website tells students they can expect education benefits payments to continue during a lapse in appropriations. For any future lapses in funding, we urge you to use your existing authorities to follow the White House's own guidance on carrying out mandatory

programs during any lapse in appropriated funding. Based on the guidance provided in the “Frequently Asked Questions During a Lapse in Appropriations” document hosted on the White House’s website, dated October 3, 2025, agencies should continue activities that are “necessarily implied,” including “a function for which funding remains available during the lapse, where the suspension of the related activity during the funding lapse would prevent or significantly damage the execution of the funded function.” In the future, we urge you to:

1. **Keep the GI Bill Hotline Open:** The decision to furlough staff for the GI Bill Hotline (1-888-GIBILL-1) was inconsistent with White House guidance on carrying out the duties necessary for mandatory funded programs. This would be a change from previous lapses in appropriations, but the hotline serves as the essential lifeline for student veterans, their families, and survivors to track missing payments, clarify enrollment issues, and report cases of extreme financial hardship. Closing it leaves veterans, families, and survivors with no means of direct communication with VA.
2. **Deem Employees Supporting Information Technology (IT) Maintenance and Upgrades as Essential/Critical staffing:** Personnel supporting the processing of these time-sensitive, congressionally-mandated benefits are critical to limit the scope and nature of late payments.

VA education benefits remain funded during a lapse in appropriations; the closure of the GI Bill Hotline and furlough of employees needed to resolve benefits payment issues significantly damage the execution of VA’s education benefits.

We look forward to your immediate and comprehensive response.

Sincerely,



Chris Pappas
Ranking Member
Economic Opportunity Subcommittee



Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Veterans’ Affairs Committee



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee