



THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY



CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

July 2, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Restoration of entitlements for student veterans unable to make progress due to COVID-19 and extension of VA housing and subsistence benefits.

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Tester:

On behalf of the University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU) and the California Community Colleges (CCC), as well as the 2.9 million students we serve, we write to urge you to support the full restoration of GI Bill entitlements for student veterans affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the extension of payment of housing and subsistence allowances beyond the four weeks currently authorized by law.

Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, our institutions have focused our efforts to successfully transition from in-person to remote instruction, but unfortunately, not all programs and courses have been able to make this transition. Some student veterans enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, for example, have been unable to continue their studies at no fault of their own, as online instruction has not yet been established. These "hard to convert" courses and programs have led to students having to withdraw completely from their institution. While the recently enacted Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act ensured veterans would have their lifetime limit for using GI Bill benefits extended

by the length of time they were unable to attend classes due to a school or program closure, full restoration of entitlements was not included in the bill. Therefore, students who had made partial progress in a course or program before a closure had that time counted against their benefits. **For the duration of a public emergency, the VA should restore charged entitlements benefits if credit was not awarded for courses.** These affected student veterans should not have their lifetime eligibility for entitlements be penalized for circumstances beyond their control.

The Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act further ensured that monthly allowances could continue to be paid up to an additional four weeks following closure of a school or program as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. However, the pandemic is likely to continue in the fall and possibly into 2021, and existing protections are inadequate for the reality that student veterans face. It is unclear when courses or programs that were closed will be ready to resume. Because under normal circumstances course enrollment is directly tied to the amount of allowance a student veteran receives, **it is essential for Congress to ensure housing and subsistence allowance payments continue to be paid for the duration of a public emergency.** Absent new protections, tens of thousands of student veterans we serve are at risk of being unable to pay for daily expenses and meet their basic needs. Food and housing insecurity may jeopardize the ability of these students to return to their studies when closed schools and programs resume instruction.

Currently, students receiving GI Bill benefits cannot be paid a housing allowance for courses that do not count directly towards their approved education plan. This has created significant difficulty for students in programs requiring students to learn in public spaces, such as nursing students needing clinical hours in hospitals or teaching credential students who must complete student teaching in K-12 schools which are now closed. They are both unable to enroll in their required experiential courses and prohibited from taking additional courses to maintain full time student status. This has resulted in a significant reduction or even elimination of their monthly housing allowance. The financial impacts can be devastating.

The GI Bill has been the single most important factor in our student veterans' success. Now more than ever, we need Congress to take action to restore GI Bill entitlement benefits and continue monthly allowances to ensure student veterans have the support they need to maintain their learning and complete their programs. We appreciate your continued leadership to support military affiliated students and we look forward to supporting your efforts in the coming weeks and months.

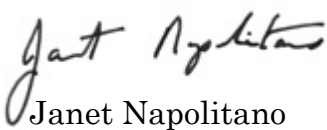
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If you or your staff have any questions, please contact our federal governmental relations staff. At UC, contact Chris Harrington (Chris.Harrington@ucdc.edu, (202) 974-6314); at CSU, contact Jim Gelb (JGelb@calstate.edu, (202) 434-8060); and at CCC, contact David O'Brien (dobrien@cccco.edu, (650) 704-9477).

Yours very truly,



Janet Napolitano
President
University of California



Timothy P. White
Chancellor
California State University



Eloy Ortiz Oakley
Chancellor
California Community Colleges