

# Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

**Presentation to Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group  
of the  
Council for Adult and Experiential Learning**

# Agenda

- Overview of Veterans First Act, S. 2921
  - Accountability
  - Health Care
  - Compensation Benefits and Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims
  - Veterans Homelessness
  - Burial Issues
  - Education Issues
- Other Veteran Issues

# S. 2921, the Veterans First Act

- Bipartisan bill reflecting major initiatives of the Committee during the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress
- 45 Senators cosponsoring bill
- Endorsed by 17 veteran, military, and advocacy organizations
- Voted out of Committee without opposition
- Includes 9 Titles addressing different areas of veterans law, healthcare, and benefits
- Go to <http://www.veterans.senate.gov/> and follow link under “Featured Items” for more information

# Title I Accountability

- Creates Office of Whistleblower Protection
- Makes senior executives directly accountable to VA Secretary
- Shortens the removal and disciplinary appeals process for employees
- Improves annual performance plan to address poor performance and misconduct

# Titles II Health Care

- Improves the Choice Program
- Expands and Improves Caregivers Assistance to more veterans
- Provisions on Opioid Addiction
- Mental Health Care
- Toxic Exposure Research
- Homeless Veterans Programs

# Title VI Homeless Veterans

- Expands VA's definition of homeless to include those fleeing domestic violence
- Increases case management to improve retention of housing by at-risk veterans
- Codifies the existing National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans
- Reviews grant recipients annually
- Requires VA to submit report on housing outreach
- Expands eligibility for homeless benefits
- Allows per diem payments to dependents of homeless veterans
- Provides case management for veterans most at-risk for becoming homeless
- Authorizes VA to partner with entities to provide legal services to homeless veterans

# Titles III, VII and VIII Compensation and burial Benefits, Court of Appeals

- Improves process for survivors to get benefits
- Increases Medal of Honor special pension
- Pilot program on fully developed appeals
- WASP and Active Duty Designee Inurnment at Arlington Cemetery
- Expands eligibility for grave marker medallions
- Temporary expansion of Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims

# Title IV - Education

- 20 sections related to veterans education and employment
- Expansion or improvement of benefits
- Improved oversight and administration by VA and State approving agencies



# Expansion or improvement of benefits

- Authorizes additional benefits for spouses and children and allows surviving spouses more time to use education benefits
- Allows VA to reinstate benefits to veterans when their school closes
- Expands Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility to thousands of mobilized Reservists
- Requires that any educational or training program pursued under Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment must also be approved for the purposes of the Montgomery GI Bill or Post-9/11 GI Bill
- Authorizes VA to make an alternative election on behalf of an individual if the selection is not in their best interest; also requires that the veteran be notified
- Improves the approval and oversight of education programs by VA
- Expands student veteran work study opportunities to State Approving Agencies, nursing homes, and cemeteries
- Expands opportunities for reservists to regain lost payments and lost entitlement for the Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve education program when an activation interferes with their studies
- Allows individuals who lost eligibility of REAP to credit their previous service towards the Post-9/11 GI Bill
- Requires schools to include student academic progress information in their reports to the VA; also requires VA to include that academic progress information in its report to Congress

# Improved oversight and administration

- Centralized reporting from groups of schools
- VA shares with educational institutions the amount of benefit left for a student
- Improves the statutory authority of SAAs to review and disapprove programs for failing to meet approval requirements
- Gives the VA Secretary the ability to review additional SAA approval criteria
- Requires any program designed to prepare an individual for licensure or certification in a state to meet that state's criteria
- Requires that VA conduct an annual compliance survey of educational institutions and training establishments
- Ensures GI Bill transferees that are dependents of active duty servicemembers are guaranteed in-state tuition rate

# Additional Education Issues outside Veterans First Act

- The closure of ITT
- The withdrawal of recognition of ACICS
- Ashford University

Questions?