

October 21, 2021

U.S. Representative Mike Bost
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
B-234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Bost:

On behalf of the associations listed below, representing two- and four-year, public, and private colleges and universities, I write to thank you for introducing H.R. 5509, the Student Veteran COVID-19 Protection Act. We strongly support this legislation, which includes important provisions to help ensure veterans can continue to receive their education benefits and provides technical corrections to legislation enacted earlier this year. We stand ready to work with you and your colleagues to ensure that legislation addressing these issues is passed by Congress and enacted into law as quickly as possible.

Among its provisions, H.R. 5509 would extend certain COVID-related flexibilities granted to the secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the wake of the pandemic. Without this extension, veterans could see their benefits reduced or cut off if, for example, their institution is forced to move instruction online due to the pandemic. Colleges and universities are working hard to keep campuses open for in-person learning this year, but already we have seen limited cases of campuses reverting to online instruction in response to evolving health conditions in their communities. Extending these provisions now will allow the secretary to make adjustments as needed and ensure that veterans' benefits are not disrupted.

H.R. 5509 also includes critical technical corrections to address unintended consequences stemming from the Isakson Roe Act, Public Law 116-315, and the THRIVE Act, Public Law 117-16. Because these provisions of the law took effect on August 1, it is critical that Congress move quickly to address these concerns.

We are grateful to see changes that would ensure VA's incentive compensation provision is parallel to the incentive compensation provision in the Higher Education Act, and that these provisions will be interpreted consistently. We also appreciate changes that would allow institutions to satisfy section 1018's consumer information requirements by using the Department of Education's "College Financing Plan" template. In addition, we appreciate language allowing the secretary to waive the second certification requirement for institutions with a flat rate tuition and fee structure. These and other technical corrections address the implementation concerns raised by our colleges and universities while maintaining important protections for veterans.

Finally, the bill would provide important flexibility to expand the ability of veterans to take advantage of the VA's "rounding out" policy. Without this flexibility, many veterans would see a cut in their education benefits during the last term of their education program. We strongly support ensuring that veterans can maintain full-time education benefits as they near completion of their degrees. With students typically registering for spring semester classes before Thanksgiving break, swift enactment of this provision will help ensure veterans can make appropriate class scheduling decisions without risking a loss of benefits.

Thank you for your continued work on behalf of our nation's veterans. We greatly appreciate the work of you and your staff in assembling this bill. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that legislation addressing these issues is quickly enacted into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Mitchell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ted" being more prominent than the last name "Mitchell".

Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Council on Education
Association of American Universities
Association of Governing Boards
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Council of Graduate Schools
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators