



## Policy Priorities 2021-2022

### The GI Bill is the Front Door to the VA

The veteran advocacy community has largely focused on the implementation of the Forever GI Bill and increasing protections against fraud, waste, and abuse as we continue to expand educational opportunities for veterans over the last few years. Looking forward to 2021 and beyond, SVA is committed to the next phase of thinking about the GI Bill and elevating the voices of student veterans and their everyday needs.

Our policy priorities stem from direct interactions with student veterans at our annual Regional Summits, Leadership Institute, Washington Week and National Conference. Our 2021 National Conference was held virtually February 19-20 and had record-breaking student veteran attendance.

Based on what we have heard from student veterans, we are committed to our priorities having a central theme: **the GI Bill is the 'front door' to VA**. Typically, using the GI Bill is one of the first interactions a newly transitioned veteran will have with VA in the universe of post-service benefits and programs. This means a seamless GI Bill process is key to establishing trust and confidence in the agency.

In doing this, SVA will continue to advocate for policies that improve the daily lives of student veterans and their families, increase efficacy of government programs used by student veterans, push for greater data transparency, and elevate the success and value of an educated veteran population.

The effects of truly embracing the GI Bill as the front door to VA will be felt immediately, as veterans across the country will see improvements in their first interactions with VA, and long after as well. At SVA, we often say student veterans are the ambassadors for military service. Similarly, the quality of VA's service to student veterans is the ambassador for all VA services.

### GI Bill Improvements

- Comprehensively review and update MHA to address rate disparities such as those related to break pay, rural areas, overseas institutions, and medical rotations.
- Codify emergency GI Bill protections created during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ensure members of the National Guard and Reserve receive the same benefits as those on active duty when performing the same work.
- Expand protections for members of the National Guard and Reserve who face short-term deployments and training obligations during their academic term.
- Formalize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Rounding Out practice.
- Strengthen the initial GI Bill approval process for new institutions seeking to enroll GI Bill students.
- Monitor and ensure quality implementation of recent GI Bill legislation.

### VA Modernization

- Establish the Veteran Economic Opportunity Administration with Undersecretary representation for all economic opportunity and transition programs at VA.
- Fully integrate an enterprise-wide contact database and better leverage available communication technology, like text messaging, to connect more effectively with beneficiaries.
- Continue to expand and modernize the GI Bill Comparison Tool.
- Expand VA Work Study options to include opportunities that better align with student goals and career fields.
- Review and improve study abroad regulations for GI Bill and VR&E students.
- Establish parity between the Post-9/11 GI Bill and VR&E MHA rates.
- Improve VA communications on new or updated policies and ensure all handbooks accurately reflect all required regulations.

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## Higher Education Act Reauthorization

- Count VA and DoD educational benefits as federal funds for the purpose of applying the 90-10 rule and to close the existing loophole.
- Strengthen the power of the higher education triad to prevent predatory practices across all education sectors.
- Restore and strengthen the Gainful Employment and Borrower Defense rules to defend students and taxpayers against fraud, waste, and abuse.
- Improve oversight and accountability procedures for proprietary schools converting to non-profit status, with a focus on quality outcomes for students.
- Protect and improve Income-Driven Repayment and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

## Accountability and Affordability

- Strengthen the accreditation process to prioritize student outcomes and innovative learning practices.
- Call for studies that analyze the efficacy of new trends and innovations, especially digital material, in higher education, including the risks and benefits they pose to students.
- Institutionalize accountability standards through regular reports to Congress and third-party stakeholders, department-level and congressional oversight, and annual reviews of program process.
- Increase oversight and legal rights for military-connected students experiencing school closures or overpayment collections.
- Call for better data on how student debt impacts student veterans, service members, and their families.

## Post-Traditional Student Needs for Success

- Review government programs, such as Unemployment Insurance and SNAP, for gaps in eligibility for student veterans revealed during COVID-19 response.
- Call for better data on student food and housing insecurity.
- Increase access to childcare, including through expanded on-campus services.
- Explore options to better integrate and support VA healthcare on campuses.
- Increase the number of VR&E counselors and VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) locations.
- Expand access to reliable broadband internet.

## Effective and Empowering Government

- Improve and coordinate data collection and sharing practices across government agencies, including making more data publicly available.
- Create opportunities for veterans to opt-out of existing benefits and programs instead of current opt-in requirements.
- Disaggregate unrelated topics in negotiated rulemaking.
- Clarify and improve VA regulatory guidance on education benefits.
- Encourage Congress and policy leaders to use language focused on empowerment of veterans.
- Reform VA debt collection procedures to help students better understand when and what they owe.
- Support more efficient communication and coordination between the Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of Labor, and VA through the establishment of interagency task forces, opportunities for stakeholder representation, and an inter-departmental liaison role.

## About Student Veterans of America

With a mission focused on empowering student veterans, SVA is committed to providing an educational experience that goes beyond the classroom. Through a dedicated network of more than 1,500 on-campus chapters in all 50 states and three countries overseas representing more than 754,000 student veterans, SVA aims to inspire yesterday's warriors by connecting student veterans with a community of like-minded chapter leaders. Every day these passionate leaders work to provide the necessary resources, network support, and advocacy to ensure student veterans can effectively connect, expand their skills, and ultimately achieve their greatest potential.

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