September 14, 2018

Secretary Robert Wilkie
US Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

The undersigned military and veterans service organizations, representing millions of veterans, service
members, their families, and survivors, write to express our disappointment over ongoing information
technology (IT) issues impacting GI Bill students’ Monthly Housing Allowances (MHA). Given the significant
impact monthly housing allowances have on the lives of over one million veterans and families, we urge
swift attention and oversight from your office into the issues surrounding the Office of Information and
Technology (OI&T).

The Harry W. Colmery Act, better known as the Forever GI Bill, included several provisions aimed at
addressing inequities in the MHA students receive. These changes require significant modifications to the
existing education IT systems, but nearly six weeks after the August 1 implementation date, and nearly a
month into the Fall 2018 semester, the IT systems are still failing. VA should immediately address the
following:

**Correct and prompt payments.** The failure of VA’s OI&T to institute a timely software update to VA’s Long
Term Solution (LTS) claims processing system are negatively affecting the accuracy of payments sent to
students and schools. These incorrect payments are asking veterans, their families, and schools to bear
the burden of VA’s problems. The consequences of this burden on students and higher education
institutions lead to heavy financial burdens. Institutions of higher learning rely on timely and accurate
payments from VA to cover the cost of tuition for students. Furthermore, students rely on MHA to pay for
their living expenses such as rent, utilities, and food.

**Greater Communication.** Transparent communication from VA on these issues have been woefully
lacking. It took several weeks into the current semester before any communication was sent to students
and schools have received little information beyond “wait and see.” Transparency on what to expect and
when to expect it, from all levels of leadership at VA, is critical to helping students and schools make
informed decisions.

**Reassurance on payment issues.** VA has stated they will not collect overpayments and will rectify
underpayments in cases due only to these IT delays. VA should strongly stress to students and schools
that they will not bear any undue financial burden for VA OI&T’s delays and should apply a liberal standard
to the reason behind incorrect payments.

**Upcoming changes.** Given VA has struggled to reach its goals of implementing section 107 of the Forever
GI Bill in addition to the regular, annual updates to MHA by August 1, we are concerned about VA’s ability
to implement additional sections requiring IT upgrades. VA has the opportunity to get ahead of the next
round of updates and we urge strong leadership and oversight over the implementation of this provision.

We appreciate the dedication and attention given by VA toward implementing the majority of Forever GI
Bill’s 34 provisions on time. The Veterans Benefits Administration office of Education Service has been
consistently proactive in communicating to stakeholders on issues related to the timely and effective
implementation of these provisions. However, the inability by VA OI&T to adequately and timely meet the
requirements of the law to support VBA’s requirements – especially one that affects a veterans’ wellbeing
during school - is an organizational and customer service failure at the highest level. They have left students
and schools confused, with improper payments, and absent a clearly articulated timeline for when these
issues will be fixed. We also acknowledge it is imperative VA receive the necessary resources to have an
effective IT system that supports all of its constituents; we encourage Congress to work quickly to meet
those needs.
Students, schools, and taxpayers need assurances and answers to how this will be resolved and prevented in the future. We look forward to continuing working together with VA to resolve these issues.

Sincerely,

Joseph Chenelly
Executive Director
AMVETS National Headquarters

Frank Yoakum
Sergeant Major, U.S. Army (Retired)
Executive Director
EANGUS

Kristofer Goldsmith
President
High Ground Veterans Advocacy

Paul Rieckhoff
Founder & CEO
Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America

Adam Behrendt
President
Ivy League Veterans Council

Barry Schneider
National Commander
Jewish War Veterans

Douglas Greenlaw
National Commander
Military Order of the Purple Heart

Carl Blake
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America

Jared Lyon
President and CEO
Student Veterans of America

Larry Madison
Legislative Director
The Enlisted Reserve Association

Laura L’Esperance
Senior Vice President, External Affairs
The Mission Continues

Bonnie Carroll
President and Founder
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

Carrie Wofford
President
Veterans Education Success

Robert Wallace
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars

Rick Weidman
Executive Director
Vietnam Veterans of America