

Expanded - Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017

On July 24 the House (the Senate passed it on August 2) unanimously passed the

Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017. This bipartisan legislation dramatically updates and improves veteran
education programs. It awaits likely passage in the Senate and signature from the President.

- ❖ Lifetime Benefit: For the first time in the history of the GI Bill, new servicemembers will be able to use the benefit throughout their lifetime (current GI Bill benefits expire 15 years after a veteran's last discharge). Eligible recipients would be servicemembers whose last discharge was after 1/1/2013, and surviving spouses and children.
- Simplification & Reduced Administrative Costs: The proposed language would simplify benefits for future servicemembers by consolidating the GI Bill into a single program (currently there is the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post 9/11 GI Bill).
- This Bill Helps all Cohorts and Ages of Veterans and Beneficiaries: The education improvements of this bill covers all sectors of need for the GI Bill that have been advocated for by veteran and military service organizations for years, including:
 - New Servicemembers and Veterans
 - o Restore & protects GI Bill benefits for veterans if a school closes in the middle of a semester (ITT Tech/Corinthian).
 - o Provides access to an additional 9 months of GI Bill eligibility (tuition and fees, living stipend, and book allowance) for over 3,300 veterans per year working towards a STEM degree.
 - o Provides access to a pilot program that would provide extra benefits beyond the GI Bill to pay for accelerated learning programs in high technology areas, such as coding and IT boot camps.
 - o Improves VA's IT infrastructure and administrative processes that will improve the quality of approved schools and provide quicker and more accurate claims processing.
 - o Make it easier and cheaper to use the GI bill to take national tests or tests that lead to a license or credential.
 - Reservists and National Guardsmen
 - Improves eligibility for those who have served less than 36 months on qualifying active duty service by eliminating the 40% tier and bumping these individuals up to the 50% tier and making the current 50% tier equal to 60%.
 - Provides new eligibility for the Post 9/11 GI Bill for those who served on active duty under section 12304(a), 12304(b), and 12301(h) orders (Reservists and Guardsmen who are currently being put on active duty and convalescent medical leave orders that do not currently accrue GI Bill eligibility).
 - Provides full Post 9/11 GI Bill eligibility to Purple Heart recipients.
 - Survivors and Dependents
 - Provides Yellow Ribbon Program eligibility for Fry Scholarship recipients and Purple Heart recipients. The Fry Scholarship provides full Post 9/11 GI Bill eligibility to survivors (parent or spouse died on active duty). The Yellow Ribbon Program allows schools to match GI Bill funds out of the school's own funds.
 - o Increases the Dependent Education Benefit: The Chapter 35 increase of \$200 more a month (over \$1 billion dollar investment over ten years) is one of the first significant increases to this benefit for decades. VA estimates that in FY 2018 nearly 100,000 dependents and survivors would be positively impacted by this change. This impacts not only pre 9/11 survivors where the servicemember died on active duty, but also the dependents of 100% service connected disabled veterans or those where the servicemember died of a service-connected injury.