

JACKY ROSEN
3RD DISTRICT, NEVADA

WASHINGTON OFFICE
413 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-3252

LAS VEGAS OFFICE
8872 SOUTH EASTERN, SUITE 220
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89123
(888) 216-5692



COMMITTEE ON
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE,
SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

October 30, 2018

The Honorable Paul R. Lawrence PhD.
Under Secretary for Benefits
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Dr. Lawrence:

I write to raise serious concerns regarding the delay of G.I. Bill monthly housing allowance (MHA) benefits owed to student veterans in Nevada and across the country. These delays and the unexpected financial uncertainty resulting from them are forcing veterans into debt and risking the possibility of homelessness for them and their families as they seek to earn an education, pay their bills, and prepare for the workforce.

Your October 5, 2018 correspondence with House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Phil Roe suggests that these delayed payments are the result of an IT issue related to the deferred implementation of Section 107 of the Forever G.I. Bill. As you know, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) overhaul of the education benefits processing system was supposed to be completed by August 1, 2018, before the beginning of the Fall 2018 semester. Unfortunately, the new system floundered upon its launch and its full implementation was deferred. These errors have potentially led to thousands of student veterans' MHA certifications never reaching the adjudication process, have led to increased processing times, and have increased the number of pending education benefit claims by fifty-two percent. Furthermore, student veterans impacted by these payment delays have reported frustration when attempting to contact the VA, experiencing long wait times, unhelpful guidance, and little explanation.

I recently wrote to Education Service Director Robert Worley regarding the VA's implementation of Section 107, after hearing concerns from multiple colleges, universities, veteran service organizations, and student veterans -- including the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), located just outside of the Congressional district I represent -- that VA's interpretation of the new law could have severe, unintended consequences for veterans and the institutions of higher education that serve them. As an original co-sponsor of the Forever G.I. Bill, I fully support the goal of the policy change made by Section 107, which attempts to more accurately match MHA rates to veterans' actual cost of living, closing a loophole that allowed some schools to attract student veterans with promises of inflated housing

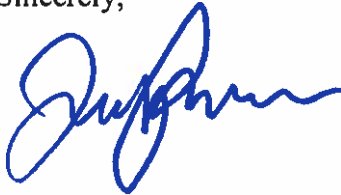
reimbursements.¹ Under VA's interpretation, however, schools are facing the administrative burden of reporting the ZIP code for every single class, internship, and student teaching site where their student veterans are located, learning, and working.

I recently met with student veterans at UNLV, which enrolls nearly 1,500 G.I. Bill beneficiaries, who raised concerns that such a requirement may also unintentionally decrease housing allowances for student veterans whose class and internship ZIP codes may not properly reflect their true cost of living. This change may especially hurt student veterans participating in internships in low-income and rural areas, including parts of Nevada. The processing delays VA has admitted to in its response to Chairman Roe add insult to this injury, delaying payments that themselves may not even reflect the true cost of living for our student veterans.

I therefore urge you to immediately address these shortcomings and provide our veterans with the benefits they are owed in a timely manner. It is your responsibility to execute Congressional intent, which was to prevent abuse of the system by bad actors and to help student veterans, not leave them with inadequate and delayed housing allowances.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to continuing to work with VA on improving education for our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen
Member of Congress

¹ <https://www.legion.org/legislative-testimony/238267/legislative-hearing-harry-w-colmery-veterans-educational-assistance-act> ("As a consequence, some schools receive an unfair recruiting advantage by paying student veterans more than what was intended for BAH in that area. The American Legion believes that veterans should not make their educational choices based on housing benefit inconsistencies. Section 105 ensures veterans receive an adequate and fair housing allowance while eliminating fraud and abuse of the program.")