

recognized as State-approved supervisors, yet they are not eligible to supervise within the VA because they do not have the "approved supervisor" designation. Some licensed family and marriage therapists have left VA employment because of this restriction which contributes to vacancies among mental health providers within the Department.

H.R. 658 would help expand veterans' access to mental health care by expanding the pool of eligible licensed marriage and family therapist applicants for both rank and file and supervisory positions.

We must ensure that dedicated mental health professionals are able to fully support our veterans. That is why I support this legislation, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. BROWNLEY), the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health and the author of this legislation.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Madam Speaker, I thank the chairman and ranking member for bringing my bill forward today.

I rise in support of the bill titled: Establishment of Qualifications for the Appointment of a Person as a Marriage and Family Therapist, Qualified to Provide Clinical Supervision, in the Veterans Health Administration, legislation I have authored, because of the very real stories I have heard from veterans, from their families, and from therapists, not only in my district but across our great country.

Ventura County has a long and proud military history. We are home to Naval Base Ventura County, and more than 40,000 veterans call our community home.

Every day, I see the strength, the resilience, and sacrifice of these families. I also see the challenges they face when their service ends and their transition back to civilian life begins. That transition is not only difficult for many servicemembers. It affects their spouses. It affects their children, and it affects entire families.

□ 1720

Many of these families, rightly so, turn to therapy and counseling for support as they navigate major life changes, trauma, and the stress that can follow after years of service.

Licensed marriage and family therapists are often the professionals helping these veterans and their families. They help couples work through their challenges. They help parents and children communicate. They help veterans develop healthy coping mechanisms and rebuild stability at home.

However, the VA's current promotion rules are discouraging many of these highly trained and qualified therapists from working at VA facilities throughout the country. While VA hires mar-

riage and family therapists who are accredited through different organizations, under current VA regulations, only therapists who graduated from the one specific accreditation pathway are eligible to be promoted into supervisory roles at VA. This is despite the fact that, nationwide, nearly 30 percent of licensed marriage and family therapists did not graduate from that specific accreditation program. In States like New York, Florida, and Ohio, that number is closer to 40 percent. In my home State of California, 95 percent of licensed marriage and family therapists hold licenses from other programs.

Let's be clear: All of these marriage and family therapists are fully licensed in their States where they practice and are fully qualified professionals. Their accreditations are also already recognized by private insurance, TRICARE, and some State Medicaid programs.

However, inside the VA system, they hit a career ceiling, which they cannot fix because this credential cannot be obtained retroactively. What happens? They leave, or they never come to the VA in the first place, and veterans and their families lose access to care or lose the therapists that they have trusted.

I have heard directly from therapists who want to serve veterans but feel pushed away by this outdated rule. I have heard from so many veterans who want to keep their therapist who has helped them and their family through some of the hardest moments of their lives.

This bill is about fixing that. It is about recognizing that these therapists are qualified, capable, and already doing life-changing work for veterans and their families. It is about removing an unnecessary bureaucratic barrier that is shrinking the pool of providers and supervisors at a time when demand for mental health services has never been greater.

More importantly, this bill is about upholding our promise to care for veterans after their service, not just with words, but with access to support their families' needs to stay strong and healthy.

This legislation passed the Veterans' Affairs Committee with strong, bipartisan support.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill today and support our Nation's veterans and their families who depend on this care.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in passing H.R. 658, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I encourage everyone to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 658, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the

rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VETERANS EDUCATION AND TECHNICAL SKILLS OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 2025

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1458) to amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the criteria for approval of certain independent study programs for purposes of the educational assistance programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1458

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Education and Technical Skills Opportunity Act of 2025" or the "VETS Opportunity Act of 2025".

SEC. 2. REPAYMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE: TIMING; MECHANISM FOR INDIVIDUALS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR A MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (f) of section 3327 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by striking "together" and all that follows through "before" and inserting "not later than 60 days after"; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(4) ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL NOT ELIGIBLE FOR A MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND.—In the case of an individual making an election under subsection (a) who is described by subparagraph (A), (C), or (E) of paragraph (1) of that subsection, and who is not eligible for a monthly stipend payable under section 3313(c) of this title, the educational assistance payable to the individual under this chapter shall be paid—

"(A) in a lump sum calculated by multiplying—

"(i) the total amount of contributions described in paragraph (1)(A) with regards to such individual; and

"(ii) the sum of the number of months described in subclauses (I) and (II) of paragraph (1)(B)(i) with regards to such individual; and

"(B) to the individual not later than 60 days after the exhaustion of the individual's entitlement to educational assistance under this chapter."

(b) TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS AND CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Such subsection is further amended—

(1) by striking "paragraphs (2) through (7)" and inserting "paragraphs (2) through (6)"; and

(2) in paragraph (1), in the heading, by inserting "FOR AN INDIVIDUAL ELIGIBLE FOR A MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND" after "ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE".

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on August 1, 2026.

SEC. 3. TREATMENT OF CERTAIN INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAMS UNDER EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3680A(a)(4)(A)(ii)(III) of such title is amended—

(1) by inserting “that requires regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors” after “course of study”;

(2) in item (aa), by striking “; or” and inserting a semicolon;

(3) in item (bb), by striking “; and” and inserting “; or”; and

(4) by adding at the end by following new item:

“(cc) an institution of higher education, as such term is defined in section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1002), that is approved to participate or participating in the student financial assistance programs authorized by title IV of that Act; and”.

(b) **APPLICABILITY.**—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to a quarter, semester, or term, as applicable, that begins on or after August 1, 2026.

SEC. 4. ABSENCE FROM CERTAIN EDUCATION DUE TO CERTAIN SERVICE.

(a) **OPTIONS.**—Section 3691A of such title is amended by striking paragraph (1) of subsection (a) and inserting the following:

“(1) A covered member may, after receiving orders to enter a period of covered service—

“(A) withdraw from covered education;

“(B) take a leave of absence from covered education; or

“(C) subject to subsection (d), enter into an agreement with the institution concerned to complete a course of covered education to the satisfaction of such institution concerned.”.

(b) **CONFORMING AMENDMENT.**—Such subsection is further amended, in paragraph (2)(A), by striking “or takes a leave of absence” and inserting “, takes a leave of absence, or enters into an agreement”.

(c) **AGREEMENT.**—Such section is further amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (d) as subsection (e); and

(2) by inserting, after subsection (c), the following new subsection (d):

“(d) **AGREEMENT WITH INSTITUTION CONCERNED.**—A covered member may enter into an agreement under subsection (a) only if the covered member has completed at least half of a course of covered education.”.

(d) **SECTION HEADING.**—Such section is further amended by striking the heading and inserting “**Absence from certain education due to certain service**”.

(e) **TABLE OF SECTIONS.**—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 36 of such title is amended by striking the item relating to section 3691A and inserting the following new item:

“3691A. Absence from certain education due to certain service.”.

SEC. 5. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS COMPLIANCE SURVEYS.

Section 3693 of such title is amended—

(1) in subsection (c)—

(A) by striking “not more than 10 business days of notice”;

(B) by striking “this section.” and inserting “this section—”; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

“(1) in the case of an educational institution or training establishment with a time stamp database collection feature, not fewer than 10, and not more than 15, business days of notice; and

“(2) in the case of any other educational institution or training establishment, not more than 10 business days of notice.”; and

(2) by striking subsection (d) and inserting the following new subsection (d):

“(d) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section:

“(1) The terms ‘educational institution’ and ‘training establishment’ have the meanings given such terms in section 3452 of this title.

“(2) The term ‘school certifying official’ means an employee of an educational institution with primary responsibility for certifying veteran enrollment at the educational institution.”.

SEC. 6. NOTIFICATION OF SCHOOL CERTIFYING OFFICIALS OF HANDBOOK UPDATES.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 14 business days after updating the school certifying official handbook of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide notice to all school certifying officials of such update.

(b) **SCHOOL CERTIFYING OFFICIAL DEFINED.**—The term “school certifying official” means an employee of an educational institution with primary responsibility for certifying veteran enrollment at the educational institution.

SEC. 7. EXTENSION OF CERTAIN LIMITS ON PAYMENTS OF PENSION.

Section 5503(d)(7) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “January 31, 2033” and inserting “May 31, 2034”.

The **SPEAKER** pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) and the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 1458, as amended.

The **SPEAKER** pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1458, as amended, offered by my friend and colleague, Representative JUAN CISCOMANI of Arizona.

This bill would modernize the GI Bill by approving hybrid and online independent study programs to meet veterans’ needs. During the COVID pandemic, these institutions offered classes in both online and hybrid settings to stop the spread of COVID. These institutions also received GI Bill funding during that time. Many of these institutions were even told to move their programs to fully remote.

This bill would allow these education programs to receive funding again and get more veterans into successful programs. It is clearer than ever that VA education programs need to meet veterans where they are and not the other way around.

Additionally, this bill would ensure guard and reserves who get called up on orders during a semester can receive a grade. This bill would also give school certifying officials, or SCOs, time to prepare for a required survey to ensure there is no fraud, waste, or abuse at the GI Bill-eligible institution.

Finally, this bill would also allow servicemembers and veterans who paid into the Montgomery GI Bill to receive their \$1,200 refund if they chose to fully use their post-9/11 GI Bill.

I am fully supportive of this bill as we must ensure that VA services veterans first.

This bill would not only give freedom of choice for what institution veterans can attend, but when a veteran does go to school, they would receive more protection when they are called up to protect this country.

I thank Representative JOHN JAMES of Michigan and Representative RONNY JACKSON of Texas for introducing important provisions to this language, and I thank my friend, Representative CISCOMANI, for introducing this bill and continuing to be a champion of improving education opportunities for veterans and their dependents.

My committee will continue to seek ways to level the playing field for veterans seeking education and employment so that every veteran has access to the opportunities that they want, all the while protecting the taxpayers’ investment and these programs.

Madam Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 1458, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise to express my qualified support for H.R. 1458, the VETS Opportunity Act of 2025, as amended. I support the improvements made by most of the bill, but I have concerns about some of the provisions within this legislation.

Specifically, I worry that section 3 of the bill, which would authorize the use of post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for independent study programs taught at non-degree-granting, for-profit institutions, might be used by predatory operators to target veterans with subpar programs and rob them of the benefits they have so rightfully earned.

While I believe that student veterans should have the freedom to pursue higher education in the manner that is most effective for them, H.R. 1458 risks unnecessarily exposing student veterans to bad actors and scams. With the U.S. Department of Education’s ability to provide oversight in jeopardy, expanding program approvals for new programs now is misguided.

The GI Bill is one of the most important tools we have to support the long-term success and economic mobility of veterans. With that comes a responsibility to ensure that the programs we approve for GI Bill funding are high quality and accountable and lead to meaningful employment.

H.R. 1458, while well intentioned, opens the door for a surge in non-degree-granting, for-profit providers seeking to enroll veterans in high-cost, low-quality programs that, in a troubling number of cases, fail to deliver on their promises.

The lack of minimal quality assurance mechanisms for non-degree programs is what led to congressional action to exclude them from eligibility for the Department of Defense Tuition Assistance Program in 2013.

While I strongly support expanding educational access for our Nation’s veterans, H.R. 1458, as it is currently

drafted, may have unintended consequences. Veterans deserve the widest possible array of educational opportunities, but not at the cost of diminished quality, oversight, or value.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1730

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I appreciate the concerns of the minority, and I would like to dispel some misinformation provided by the ranking member.

H.R. 1458 would expand the way in which the GI Bill benefits can be used by veterans, but it would not remove any of the guardrails in place to keep out bad actors. In fact, the bill would require regular and additional interaction between students and instructors, which would add an additional meaningful guardrail for veteran providers.

In the most recent VA “Annual Benefits Report,” only 3.5 percent of veterans pursued vocational or technical education, even though skilled trades are among the fastest growing career opportunities in the United States.

This bill would help tackle the current workforce shortage in skills and trades in the U.S. while maintaining the oversight that VA has over bad actors. Now the GI Bill already has limits on tuition payments approval and quality standards to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in the program.

Often, veterans may need to attend school or training online or hybrid, not due to performance but due to the necessity of taking care of their families or loved ones. This bill would respond to those realities, and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Senate to get the bill signed into law.

Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. CISCOMANI), the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1458, the VETS Opportunity Act of 2025, a bill I introduced to modernize veterans’ education benefits and align them with today’s workforce needs.

As I represent nearly 80,000 veterans in southern Arizona, I know firsthand when servicemembers transition to civilian life, they bring discipline, leadership, and a strong work ethic, but too often the system limits how they can use the benefits that they earned. This bill changes that by modernizing the GI Bill and expanding access to high-quality certificates and technical training programs, possibly offered in a hybrid format, that lead directly to good-paying jobs in high-demand fields.

Not every veteran wants or needs a traditional 4-year degree. Many want fast, skills-based training that connects them to careers in the trades, healthcare, technology, and other critical fields. This bill recognizes reality, and it gives veterans the flexibility to choose the path that works best for them and their families.

Furthermore, this legislation includes clear protections to ensure the program operates efficiently and that veterans’ benefits are used responsibly as well. Programs like this one must be accredited, approved by the VA, and provide regular and substantive interaction between instructors and students.

The VETS Opportunity Act is about modernizing our VA benefits and programs to empower veterans, strengthen the workforce, and honor the promise this country made to those who served. By strengthening education benefits, we empower veterans, build a stronger workforce, and drive a stronger economy.

This bill turns service into opportunity and commitment into careers. That is what our veterans deserve, and that is what our communities need.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1458 and vote “yes.”

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, before I yield to the gentleman from North Carolina, I do want to point out that the chairman was referring to hybrid programs. Our concern is not about the hybrid programs, but independent study, and that independent study loophole for for-profit, private educational providers may allow for some abuse and targeting of veterans in unintended ways. I do hope that our colleagues in the Senate will give this a second look and possibly return this legislation for final passage here.

Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. DAVIS), my good friend.

Mr. DAVIS of North Carolina. Madam Speaker, I thank Chairman BOST and Ranking Member TAKANO for their leadership.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1458, the VETS Opportunity Act of 2025. As a proud United States Air Force veteran and voice for over 56,000 veterans and their families in North Carolina’s First Congressional District, it was an honor to join and work with the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. CISCOMANI) in introducing this bipartisan legislation.

For too many veterans, the transition from military service to civilian life comes with uncertainty about how to build a new career and support their families. By expanding in-person and hybrid training options for skilled trade programs, we are bridging skills gaps across the country, empowering our veterans, and contributing to our local economies.

Madam Speaker, I believe it is time to equip eastern North Carolina’s veterans and beyond with the training and skills they so need. I encourage my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I have no additional speakers. I am ready to close, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time to close.

Madam Speaker, I again express my qualified support for H.R. 1458, the VETS Opportunity Act of 2025, as amended. I can’t express that enough.

I urge my colleagues to work with the Senate to improve this bill and ensure that it is veterans who benefit from this legislation and not bad actors.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1458, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RESIGNATION AS MEMBER OF COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following resignation as a member of the Committee on Small Business:

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, February 2, 2026.

Hon. MIKE JOHNSON,
Speaker of the House,
Washington, DC.

SPEAKER JOHNSON: It has been an honor to serve on the House Small Business Committee for the 119th Congress.

With this letter, I respectfully resign from the House Small Business Committee.

While I am stepping away from my formal membership on the House Small Business Committee, I will never stop being a champion for the Small Businesses of South and Central New Jersey.

Most sincerely,
HERB CONAWAY, JR.,
Congressman.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the resignation is accepted.

There was no objection.

APPOINTMENT OF INDIVIDUAL TO NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker’s appointment, pursuant to 29 U.S.C. 780, and the order of the House of January 3, 2025, of the following individual on the part of the House to the National Council on Disability:

Mr. Brian Patchett, Bossier City, Louisiana

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 6:30 p.m. today.

Accordingly (at 5 o’clock and 37 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.