

**Forever GI Bill
Education Call Center
Script/Q&A**

Issue

H.R. 3218, the “Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017,” 115th Congress, 1st Session

Introduction

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, also known as the “Forever GI Bill,” contains several changes that affect GI Bill recipients past and future. The majority of the changes enhance or expand education benefits for Veterans, Servicemembers, Families and Survivors. Below is a summary of some of the changes.

Purpose

This script shall be used to answer questions received regarding amendments to title 38, United States Code, which make improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

What is the new legislation?

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, also known as the Forever GI Bill, will expand benefits for Servicemembers, Veterans, and dependents. Most notably, this new law will remove the 15-year time limitation for Veterans who transitioned after January 1, 2013, and qualifying dependents, meaning there will no longer be a deadline to use the GI Bill program. The new law will also restore benefits to certain individuals who were impacted by school closures and certain program disapprovals since 2015, and provides special benefits for reservists, surviving dependents, and Purple Heart recipients.

VA is working to ensure implementation of these bills in a timely manner. Please visit our website at <http://benefits.va.gov/qibill/foreverqibill.asp> or read the law on Congress.gov.

What will change?

This legislation contains 34 new provisions, the vast majority of which will enhance or expand education benefits for Veterans, Servicemembers, and dependents. Over the next year, we will be distributing information regarding these changes. Every change is to help you get benefits more efficiently.

What goes into effect immediately?

There are several provisions that went into effect on the date of enactment, when the President signs the bill into law. These are:

- The 15-year time limitation for using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits is eliminated for Veterans who left active duty on or after January 1, 2013, and qualifying dependents (Fry children who became eligible on or after January 1, 2013 and all Fry spouses).

- Reservists who had eligibility under the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) and lost it due to the program sunset provision will have that service credited toward the Post-9/11 GI Bill program.
 - Certain work-study is permanently authorized; previously it had to be re-approved by Congress every few years.
 - The VetSuccess on Campus program will be available to students across the country
 - VA will help Veterans to more clearly identify schools that offer them priority enrollment
- VA is working to ensure implementation of these new provisions in a timely manner.

When will VA have more information?

VA has been diligently working through each provision in order to determine what is needed to implement the law. We'll post updates to our GI Bill website and Facebook. You can read more about each provision on our website, benefits.va.gov/gibill/forevergibill.asp.

Below is a summary of some of the changes:

Reserve Duty That Counts Toward Post-9/11 Eligibility

The time that a Reservist was ordered to active duty to receive authorized medical care, be medically evaluated for disability, or complete a Department of Defense (DoD) health care study on or after September 11, 2001, now counts as active duty toward eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill program. An individual may use this entitlement to pursue a course of education beginning on or after August 1, 2018.

Purple Heart Recipients

Servicemembers and honorably discharged Veterans who were awarded a Purple Heart on or after September 11, 2011 will be entitled to Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits at the 100-percent benefit level for up to 36 months. This is effective on August 1, 2018.

Yellow Ribbon Extension to Fry and Purple Heart Recipients

Recipients of the Fry Scholarship and Purple Heart will be covered under the Yellow Ribbon Program. This is effective on August 1, 2018.

Yellow Ribbon Extension to Active Duty Servicemembers

Active duty Servicemembers may use the Yellow Ribbon program effective August 1, 2022.

Consolidation of Benefit Levels

Eliminates the 40-percent benefit level and expands the 60-percent benefit level under the Post 9/11 GI Bill program. An individual with aggregate service of 90 days but less than six months of active-duty service (excluding entry and skill training) now qualifies at the 50-percent benefit level. An individual with aggregate service of at least six months but less than eighteen months of active-duty service (excluding entry and skill training) now qualifies at the 60-percent benefit level. This removes the 40-percent benefit level. This section will take effect on August 1, 2020.

Member Serves	Percentage of Maximum Benefit Payable
At least 36 months	100%
At least 30 continuous days on active duty and must be discharged due to service-connected disability or received a Purple Heart (Purple Heart effective August 1, 2018)	100%
At least 30 months, but less than 36 months	90%
At least 24 months, but less than 30 months	80%
At least 18 months, but less than 24 months	70%
At least 6 months, but less than 18 months	60%
At least 90 days, but less than 06 months	50%

REAP Eligibility Credited Toward Post-9/11 GI Bill Program

Members of the Reserve who established eligibility to educational assistance under the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) before November 25, 2015, and lost it due to the sunset provision may elect to have that service credited towards the Post-9/11 GI Bill program.

Monthly Housing Based on Campus Student Attends the Majority of their Classes

The law requires the monthly housing allowance (MHA) under the Post-9/11 GI Bill program to be calculated based on the zip code of the campus where the student physically attends the majority of classes, rather than the location of the institution of higher learning where the student is enrolled. This applies to the first enrollment in an educational program on or after August 1, 2018.

Changes to Licensing and Certification Charges

Entitlement charges for licensing and certification exams and national tests under the Post-9/11 GI Bill will be prorated based on the actual amount of the fee charged for the test.

Assistance for Students Affected by School Closures and Certain Disapprovals

VA is now authorized to restore benefits and provide relief to education beneficiaries affected by school closures or certain disapprovals. This means payments of educational assistance will not be charged against an entitlement of educational assistance, or counted against the total period for which a beneficiary may receive educational assistance under two or more programs, if VA finds that the individual was unable to complete such course or program of study as a result of:

- the closure of an educational institution; or
- the disapproval of the course or a course that is a necessary part of that program by reason of a new law, regulation, or policy implemented after the individual enrolls.
- not receiving credit, or losing training time, toward completion of the program being pursued.

VA may treat a course of education that is disapproved under this chapter as being approved, if VA determines, on a case-by-case basis, that the course was disapproved for one of the reasons stated above and continuing the course is in the best interest of the individual

This provision takes effect 90 days after August 16, 2017 and applies to courses and programs of education discontinued after August 1, 2015. For courses or programs discontinued during the period beginning January 1, 2015, and ending on August 16, 2017, an individual who *does not transfer* credits can have all his/her entitlement restored.

VA may also continue awarding a monthly housing allowance stipend under the Post-9/11 GI Bill program following a permanent school closure or certain disapproval of a course of study. The changes to monthly housing allowance will take effect on August 1, 2018, and apply to courses and programs of education discontinued on or after August 16, 2017.

Changes to Transfer of Benefits (TEB)

Veterans who transferred entitlement to a dependent can now designate a new dependent if the original dependent dies before using the entitlement.

Dependents who received transfer of entitlement under the Post-9/11 GI Bill can transfer their entitlement to another eligible dependent if the Servicemember or Veteran who made the transfer subsequently dies.

This law applies to deaths on or after August 1, 2009. A dependent to whom entitlement is transferred may use it beginning on or after August 1, 2018.

More Benefits for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Programs

VA will provide up to nine months of additional Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to certain eligible individuals who:

- have or will soon exhaust entitlement of Post-9/11 GI Bill program.
- apply for assistance, and
- are enrolled in a program of education leading to a post-secondary degree that, in accordance with the guidelines of the applicable regional or national accrediting agency, requires more than the standard 128 semester (or 192 quarter) credit hours for completion in a standard, undergraduate college degree in **biological or biomedical science; physical science; science technologies or technicians; computer and information science and support services; mathematics or statistics; engineering; engineering technologies or an engineering-related field; a health profession or related program; a medical residency program; an agriculture science program or natural resources science program**; or other subjects and fields identified by VA as meeting national needs.

- has completed at least 60 standard semester (or 90 quarter) credit hours in a field listed above, or has earned a post-secondary degree in one of these fields and is enrolled in a program of education leading to a teaching certification.

Priority would be given to individuals who are entitled to 100 percent of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits and to those that require the most credit hours.

VA can pay each eligible individual the benefits for up to nine additional months, but the total may not exceed \$30,000. VA will not be authorized to issue any Yellow Ribbon payments.

These additional benefits cannot be transferred to dependents.

This expansion becomes effective on August 1, 2019.

Elimination of 15-year Limitation to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill Program

The law removes the time limitation for the use of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for individuals whose last discharge or release from active duty is on or after January 1, 2013, children of deceased Servicemembers who first become entitled to Post-9/11 GI Bill program benefits after January 1, 2013, and all Fry spouses.

All others remain subject to the current 15-year time limitation for using their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.

Reserve Components Monthly Housing Allowance

VA will prorate the monthly housing stipend (also referred to as the “monthly housing allowance”) under the Post-9/11 GI Bill for members of the reserve components of the armed forces.

This change will be applicable to a quarter, semester or term commencing on or after August 1, 2018.

Pilot Programs for Technology Courses

VA will develop a pilot program to provide eligible Veterans who are entitled to educational assistance under chapter 30, 32, 33, 34, or 35 of title 38, United States Code, or chapter 1606 or 1607 of title 10, United States Code, with the opportunity to enroll in high technology programs of education that VA determines provide training and skills sought by employers in a relevant field or industry. This change will take effect 180 days after August 1, 2018.

Work Study Expansion

The law removes the expiration date of June 30, 2022, for certain qualifying work-study activities for which an individual may be paid an additional educational assistance allowance. These activities include outreach services for an SAA, providing hospital and domiciliary care and medical treatment to Veterans in a State home, or performing an activity relating to the administration of a national cemetery or a state Veterans' cemetery.

Changes to Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance

The new law decreases the amount of entitlement that new eligible individuals will receive under the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) program from 45 months to 36 months. This change applies to individuals who first enroll in programs of education after August 1, 2018. Individuals who first enrolled in a program of education prior to August 1, 2018, would still qualify for a maximum of 45 months of entitlement.

This law also increases the amount of educational assistance payable for pursuit of institutional courses and institutional courses under the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program. An eligible person will be entitled to a monthly allowance of \$1,224 for full-time coursework, \$967 for three-quarter time, and \$710 for half-time coursework. The increases would be effective October 1, 2018.

Using the GI Bill at Technical Schools and non-Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs)

Beneficiaries will now be able to use their Post-9/11 educational assistance to pursue accredited independent study programs at the following educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning (IHLs): area career and technical education schools that provide postsecondary level education and postsecondary vocational institutions. This change went into effect August 16, 2017.

Priority Enrollment

VA will improve outreach and transparency to Veterans and Servicemembers by providing information on whether institutions of higher learning administer a priority enrollment system that allows certain student Veterans to enroll in courses earlier than other students. This change went into effect August 16, 2017.

Informing Schools about Beneficiary Entitlement

VA must make available to educational institutions information about the amount of educational assistance to which a beneficiary is entitled under chapter 30, 32, 33, or 35. This information would be provided to the educational institution through a secure information technology system accessible by the educational institution and would be updated regularly to reflect any amounts used by the Veteran or other individual. A beneficiary pursuing a course of education may elect not to provide the information to an educational institution. This section will be effective on August 1, 2018.

Reserve Component Benefits

The law authorizes service by Guard and Reserve members under 10U.S.C 12304a and 12304b to receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. An individual entitled to educational assistance as a result of this section may use such entitlement to pursue a course of education beginning on or after August 1, 2018.

This applies to service in the Armed Forces occurring on or after June 30, 2008.

GI Bill Monthly Housing Allowance

Individuals who first use Post-9/11 GI Bill program on or after January 1, 2018 will receive monthly housing allowance based on DoD's reduced basic housing allowance (BAH) for monthly housing rates. Those that began using benefits prior to January 1, 2018 will continue to receive a higher monthly housing rate based in the non-adjusted BAH rates.