

June 23, 2014

Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller
United States House of Representatives
336 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Miller:

On behalf of the nation's public research universities, I appreciate Congress' efforts to support veterans in their pursuit of higher education degrees at our institutions and to address the real concerns of residency complications when a service member decommissions.

As you begin conference negotiations on H.R. 3230, the *Veterans' Access to Care through Choice, Accountability, and Transparency Act of 2014*, I write to draw your attention to concerns we have regarding some of the specific in-state tuition provisions directed at public colleges and universities in Sec. 702 of the Senate-amended H.R. 3230. If conference negotiations move toward including an in-state tuition provision, we urge the use of the Sec. 4 language in the House-passed H.R. 357, GI Bill Tuition Fairness Act of 2014, over Sec. 702 language in Senate-amended H.R. 3230. In particular, H.R. 357 offers the in-state residency rate solely to veterans, not their spouses or dependents, and extends the effective date to July 2016.

H.R. 357 better reflects the course of legislative action taken by many state legislatures and individual campuses to offer in-state tuition rates to out-of-state veterans. We urge you to follow this complementary approach in order to minimize the need for legislatures in these states to quickly take action to adjust and expand their laws to meet the more expansive Senate language. We are also concerned that the spouse and dependent benefit language would unfairly penalize public universities that cannot adjust their in-state policies due to legislative inaction beyond their control.

As you know, state governments have historically determined their own public higher education in-state tuition rates and residency requirements because those decisions are essentially an allocation of state, not federal resources. More than 30 states have already passed or are considering enacting legislation to provide in-state residency waivers to veterans at their public universities. In other states, several campuses and university systems, within the discretion allowed by their states, have managed to offer in-state waivers to their veteran student populations. In principle, we believe that individual states should retain their autonomy to determine in-state residency status and the allocation of states' resources. We urge Congress to take that into consideration as they proceed with this legislation.

We are deeply concerned that the in-state provision for veterans and their spouses and dependents would precipitate the loss of yellow-ribbon educational benefits, even though private non-profit and for-profit higher education institutions would still retain the yellow-ribbon benefits. Note that between 1987 and 2010, state and local appropriations for public universities dropped 28 percent. The reduction of the yellow ribbon program benefits for public universities would add further financial strain to these institutions. Additionally, as more veterans take advantage of this in-state tuition provision, costs to public universities will further increase. To help mitigate the impact of these added costs, we urge you to provide yellow-ribbon benefits to public universities that enroll students who take advantage of any provision for in-state benefits.

To be clear, public and land-grant universities have long been and continue to be committed to serving the veteran population in recognition of their commitment and service to our country. Since the passage of the original G.I. Bill in 1944, our nation's public universities have been increasingly enriched with veterans in our student bodies. With hardworking attitudes and valuable experiences, veterans provide significant contributions to the university community.

In closing, let me express our appreciation for your deep interest in higher education and its importance to veterans and to the future of the country. APLU and our member institutions, including over 200 of the nation's public research universities, land-grant universities, and state university systems, remain dedicated to providing an exceptional educational experience for our veterans. We look forward to working with you to hopefully address the issues laid out above.

Sincerely,



Peter McPherson
President, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

CC:

Senator Bernie Sanders
Senator Richard Burr
Senator Mark Begich
Senator Richard Blumenthal
Senator Sherrod Brown
Senator Tom Coburn
Senator Mazie Hirono
Senator Johnny Isakson
Senator Mike Johanns
Senator John McCain
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