

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2016

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Department of Veterans Affairs
801 Vermont Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20571

Dear Secretary McDonald,

As you are aware, this week the Department of Education formally terminated its recognition of the Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS). While this decision is warranted, it will trigger severe disruptions for more than 900,000 students who currently attend ACICS-accredited schools, including roughly 15,000 student veterans. We strongly encourage you to use the authority that Congress recently granted you to help affected student veterans complete their education

Under Public Law 114-228, Section 415, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs can continue to treat a course of education as approved for Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility for up to 18 months if the Department of Education terminates recognition for the accrediting body. In passing Section 415 as part of the Veterans' Extenders package in September 2016, Congress intended to avert the prospect of immediately cutting off Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for the 15,000 student veterans who attend ACICS-accredited schools. In particular, we sought to avert the risk of homelessness for student veterans and their families who rely on the Basic Allowance for Housing benefits to pay their monthly rent.

This new authority is intended to give student veterans enough time to either complete their education or transfer to another program of education that will provide them the quality education they deserve. Perhaps most importantly, extending access to the Post-9/11 GI Bill will allow student veterans to continue to receive their housing benefit, ensuring that they will not become homeless while completing their education or exploring options to transfer.

In the wake of ACICS's closure, we ask that you carefully consider granting continued recognition to courses of education on a case-by-case basis. The proper use of this authority will require consulting with the Secretary of Education, as well as providing notice to student veterans who attend schools whose accrediting bodies have been terminated. We hope you will take seriously your duty to notify impacted student veterans that the quality and efficacy of their program has been called into question, and to help these student veterans transfer to high-caliber institutions, such as local community colleges, when appropriate. We also request that you not automatically extend eligibility for 18 months, but rather grant continued approval for these programs only until they either find another accreditor in good standing or until student veterans are able to transfer to better programs.

We are extremely concerned about the damage that many for-profit schools are doing to students, especially student veterans. While the Department of Education's decision to terminate

recognition of ACICS was a step in the right direction, there is still significant work we must do to protect students from schools that demonstrate enormous interest in their money and no interest in their future. We look forward to working with you to ensure every student veteran is getting the most out of their GI Bill benefits.

Sincerely,



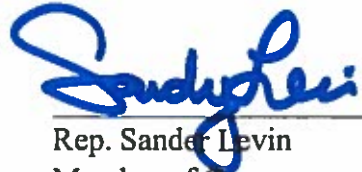
Mark Takano
Acting Ranking Member
House Veterans Affairs Committee



Rep. Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Rep. Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress



Rep. Sander Levin
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Rep. Alan Lowenthal
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Rep. Betty McCollum
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Rep. Juan Vargas
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cc:

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