



Association for Career and Technical Education
1410 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314
Toll-free: 800-826-9972 • Fax: 703-683-7424 • www.acteonline.org

**Testimony of LeAnn Wilson
Executive Director
Association for Career and Technical Education**

**Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate**

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Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal and members of the committee, on behalf of the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), the nation's largest not-for-profit association committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers, I would urge you to ensure that American veterans have access to high-quality career and technical education (CTE) opportunities in using their benefits under the Post 9/11 Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-337). CTE programs provide valuable opportunities for members of our military to prepare for economic success, however, current law arbitrarily prevents many veterans from accessing these programs. S. 3021, a bill to authorize the use of Post-9/11 Educational Assistance to pursue independent study programs at certain educational institutions that are not institutions of higher learning, would assist these heroes in obtaining the education they need for success in the civilian workforce using innovative educational approaches that best meet adult learners' needs.

Area CTE schools are public, non-profit, postsecondary institutions that award certificates, and serve a vital role in preparing students in states such as Oklahoma, Ohio and Florida with the skills and credentials they need to enter careers in growing fields. The opportunities available at these institutions are incredibly valuable, and offer graduates the chance to boost their earnings by an average of 20 percent while preparing to enter fields ranging from health care to information technology. This committee took a major step forward by approving eligibility for benefits at these institutions under the Post-9/11 Veterans Assistance Improvements Act of 2010. However, current law still



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prohibits area CTE schools from eligibility for veterans benefits if any such program includes any online or distance learning component – merely because these institutions are non-degree granting, and therefore do not fit into the federal definition of an “institution of higher learning” necessary for eligibility.

This issue prevents institutions from offering innovative and flexible learning opportunities for non-degree programs offered through online distance learning. Allowing working veterans the ability to pursue online coursework at an area CTE school affords them greater flexibility to pursue their education within their schedule. Non-degree programs offered through area CTE schools are an affordable option for veterans who want to quickly earn a postsecondary credential so they can enter the workforce and pursue the civilian career of their choice.

The quality of education should be the determining factor in whether a program is funded by veterans’ education benefits, not the institution at which it is offered. For example, Lake Tech, an area CTE school near Orlando, Florida, added a small online component (less than 10 percent of the total instruction) to its Licensed Practical Nursing program, which prepares students to earn state licensure and obtain employment in a health care occupation with a salary range of \$34,000 to \$51,000 per year. Despite the fact that the online component meets a direct student need for more scheduling flexibility, was extensively researched and piloted to ensure high-quality instruction, and that the program remains fully accredited, Lake Tech has had to turn away veterans wishing to enroll and utilize their VA education benefits because they program has been deemed ineligible merely on the basis of Lake Tech’s degree-granting status.

S. 3021 would address this problem with a targeted approach that expands eligibility for benefits to non-degree granting, non-profit institutions such as area CTE centers while preserving the integrity and program quality measures in place under current law. These programs would remain subject to multiple forms of scrutiny, including evaluation by accreditors and oversight of individual requests for benefits through the Veterans Administration. These requirements will ensure that veterans will only have access to programs that provide value and opportunity.

We encourage the committee to act expeditiously and efficiently in advancing S. 3021 on behalf of millions of veterans nationwide. Thank you for your continued leadership and thoughtful consideration of this legislation. We look forward to working in a bipartisan fashion with the committee to address the needs of our nation’s heroes.