



**TESTIMONY OF
STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. SENATE**

**HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:
“A GRATEFUL NATION: MAXIMIZING VETERANS’ SUCCESS
AFTER SERVICE”**

November 5, 2025



Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America (SVA) to submit testimony on this important hearing titled “*A Grateful Nation: Maximizing Veterans’ Success after Service*”.

With a mission focused on empowering student veterans, SVA is committed to providing an educational experience that goes beyond the classroom. Through a dedicated and expansive network of on-campus chapters across the country, SVA aims to inspire yesterday’s warriors by connecting student veterans with a community of like-minded chapter leaders. Every day these passionate leaders work to provide the necessary resources, network support, and advocacy to ensure student veterans, military-connected students, their families, caregivers, and survivors can effectively connect, expand their skills, and ultimately achieve their greatest potential.

SVA thanks the Committee for considering this issue that would impact student veterans, military-connected students, their families, caregivers, and survivors in higher education.

○

SVA represents more than 1,600 chapters at colleges and universities nationwide, encompassing over 600,000 student veterans and military-connected students. Since emerging from the 2008 grassroots coalition that helped secure the Post-9/11 GI Bill, SVA has served as the unifying voice of student veterans. Our mission is simple and enduring: to ensure that every person who served can succeed in higher education, engage in meaningful employment, and continue serving their community and country.

SVA operates at the intersection of federal policy and lived experience. Through the SVA Advising Center, SVA Career Center, and on-campus chapters, what SVA refers to as the *SVA Success Hub*, SVA transform earned benefits into outcomes, helping veterans select the right program, reduce debt, gain career-relevant experience, and build community. Thus, SVA supports, rather than supplants, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense (DoD) by converting federal entitlements into tangible outcomes on the ground where SVA acts as VA force multiplier alongside VSOC, SCOs, and campus veteran centers, supporting the GI Bill’s role as the front door to the VA.

SVA chapters already operate as localized transition hubs. Each chapter pairs peer mentorship with data-informed advising, helping veterans navigate enrollment, benefits certification, and access to campus services. The SVA Advising Center provides neutral, data-informed guidance on program selection, credit transfer, and benefit optimization so veterans choose the right school, in the right program, with minimal debt. Last year the Advising Center supported over 4,000 transitioning service members, student veterans, and families. The SVA Career Center connects student veterans to degree-relevant roles while enrolled, mentors them through the hiring process, and pilots responsible AI tools with human oversight to expand reach for under-resourced campuses. As of the beginning of the summer, over 30,000 careers had been posted to the SVA Job Board; these are organizations looking specifically at this population for their workforce needs.

SVA's National Conference ("NatCon") hosts an annual claims clinic, where SVA partners with local organizations to provide VA disability compensation claims assistance from intention to examination to decision. In 2025, the Denver Regional VA joined SVA, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, the American Legion, and others at NatCon to host a claims clinic and benefits navigation hub. There, this clinic assisted more than 400 veterans and family members with claims, appeals, and enrollment, providing almost 200 examinations on site.

These efforts demonstrate that when government, higher education, and veteran-serving organizations operate in concert, the result is measurable progress in transition, degree completion, career alignment, and family stability for those who served.

To strengthen the continuum from service to success, SVA respectfully offers three actions within this Committee's jurisdiction:

1. Direct the DoD and VA to publish annual transition forecasts.
2. Modernize VA Work-Study (VAWS) to align with degree fields and expand access.
3. Establish a VA-led interagency data task force (VA/DoD/Department of Education/Department of Labor) with a 12-month pilot and report-back.

These recommendations form a single system: better data to plan transitions, stronger work-based learning during education, and coordinated tracking of outcomes that measure sustained success.

The Transition Moment

Each year, roughly 150,000 service members leave active duty, though 200,000 are ubiquitously reported, which include those leaving inactive service.¹ The majority are non-retirees under age 35, more than half with families.² For them, transition is both an economic and social shift with a return to community life, a redefinition of identity, and for more than half, an entry into higher education.³

The DoD and VA already collect data that could forecast these transitions, but the information remains fragmented

¹ This number is generally found from U.S. Department of Defense. (2024). Defense Manpower Data Center: Chapter 2 Personnel Separations. <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil>, however, this number is imprecise and lacks nuance and context. Some of these separating service members are totally and permanently disabled and will not be expected to enter the workforce. In addition, some have unfortunately passed, but are still counted in the aggregate amongst those joining civilian life.

² See generally Student Veterans of America. (2023). SVA Census Survey [Annual survey report]. <https://studentveterans.org/research/sva-census/>

³ Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University. (2019, November). *Student veterans: A valuable asset to higher education* [Research brief]. <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/student-veterans-a-valuable-asset-to-higher-education/>

and retrospective.⁴ SVA recommends that Congress direct DoD and VA to jointly publish an annual transition forecast each summer, projecting separations and anticipated education-benefit usage for the coming year to include component, geography, and broad demographic information. With a mechanism like this in place, campuses, state and community agencies, and nonprofits can plan advising, childcare, and workforce programs ahead of demand. Employers gain predictable signals for veteran hiring pipelines. This “early-warning system” would cost little, relying on data already collected through DoD attrition and VA onboarding systems. It would also enhance oversight, allowing SVAC to measure how forecasted separations correspond with GI Bill enrollments and labor-market absorption. This effort is also likely achievable under existing DoD and VA authority, reinforced by congressional report language.

Education and Work as a Single Continuum

Education is the central throughput of transition for the vast majority of enlisted members leaving service,⁵ and SVA’s NVEST (2017) data show that veterans graduate at higher rates than traditional students but struggle with underemployment after graduation.⁶ Many earn degrees in high-demand fields such as business, health sciences, and engineering but lack direct access to industry pipelines. Instead, veterans often work in positions below their skill level during and after their studies due to limited connections to civilian employers.⁷ Even so, the 2023 LinkedIn Opportunity Report points out that veterans come into the workforce with nine out of the ten most sought after skills in corporate America.⁸ This isn’t an unnoticed phenomenon. S.2494, the *Hire Student Veterans Act* was recently introduced, which would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide the work opportunity tax credit with respect to hiring veterans who are receiving educational assistance under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs or Defense. This is a noble first step in encouraging organizations to look at this dedicated, talented, and skilled labor source. SVA also supports legislation such as S.2673, the *Medic Education and Deployment Into Civilian (MEDIC) Careers Act of 2025*, which advances similar public private pathways that prepare veterans for critical healthcare roles. SVA further encourages companies and foundations to expand such programs to include all student veterans, including those who have exhausted their GI Bill or are not eligible for benefit assistance, so that every veteran learner has an equitable opportunity to contribute their skills to America’s workforce and community

⁴ O’Hanlon, C. E., Williams, K. M., Lotspeich-Yadao, M., Brennan, M., Salazar, H. M., & Maury, R. V. (2025, January 14). Finding and using policy-relevant data about veterans: Availability, accessibility, and avenues for improvement (Research Report No. RR-A1363-17). RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA1363-17/RAND_RRA1363-17.pdf

⁵ According to IVMF (2019, November), 92% either agreed or strongly agreed that higher education is a crucial component in navigating the post-service transitional process from military to civilian life. Also reference SVA Lifecycle Atlas (on file with author).

⁶ Cate, C. A., Lyon, J. S., Schmeling, J., & Bogue, B. Y. (2017). National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A report on the academic success of student veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Student Veterans of America. https://studentveterans.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/NVEST-Report_FINAL.pdf

⁷ Morgan, N. R., Aronson, K. R., McCarthy, K., Balotti, B. A., & Perkins, D. F. (2023). Post-9/11 veterans’ pursuit and completion of post-secondary education: Social connection, mental health, and finances. *Journal of Higher Education*, 204(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574231168638>

⁸ LinkedIn Social Impact. (2023). 2023 Veteran Opportunity Report [Report]. <https://socialimpact.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/linkedinforgood/en-us/veteran-report-2023/veterans-opportunity-report-2023.pdf>

well-being.

Beyond these pieces of legislation, SVA identified a VA program that can easily be modified to support working student veterans in earning careers in their degree field. The existing VA Work-Study (VAWS), created in 1980, provides income but rarely builds workforce-aligned skills. SVA urges modernization of VAWS to align placements with degree fields, allow participation at least at half-time enrollment, digitize timekeeping, and pilot placements in shortage sectors such as healthcare, education, STEM, and cybersecurity. Alignment with degree simply makes sense both for students and for VAWS host organizations. Students are better able to build their network, learn industry practice, and earn an income to support their GI Bill benefits, while host organizations expand their workforce with talented and committed employees. Expanding this opportunity to part-time students expands the talent pool for VAWS while supporting students who, because of financial, family, or caregiving obligations, cannot commit to a full-time education, but are still eligible for their GI Bill and federal student aid. Digitizing timekeeping brings the VAWS in line with other VA initiatives in technological modernization and is the next logical step in the program.

SVA's Career Center provides proof of concept of placement in critical fields. In partnership with Grow with Google⁹ and others, SVA offers certifications in project management, data analytics, and digital skills to thousands of veterans and family members. To further connect this skilled and talented population with sectors urgently needing their expertise, federal programs should deliberately link GI Bill utilization to structured work-based learning opportunities. Veterans possess the discipline, adaptability, and service ethos that make them ideal for professions under strain such as healthcare, education, and technology. The *Independence Blue Cross Service Scholars Program* in Pennsylvania exemplifies this approach by combining tuition assistance, mentorship, and guaranteed post-graduation employment through collaboration among the Independence Blue Cross Foundation, regional universities, and healthcare employers.¹⁰ This model transforms education into a direct workforce solution, bridging the gap between federal investment and local need. These programs integrate career readiness within academic pathways, complementing federal benefits through private innovation.

Within 12 months of these changes, VA could report to this Committee: the percentage of VAWS placements aligned with degree fields, the share of participants enrolled half-time or three-quarter-time, and results from at least ten pilots connecting veterans to in-demand workforce pipelines. This reform requires no new entitlement, only administrative modernization. It would directly connect education benefits to workforce outcomes and help employers address critical national shortages with a ready, values-driven labor pool. There is expected incremental administrative cost to VA, but VA can leverage existing VAWS authority and IT modernization plans. There is also an opportunity to align this effort with legislation from the 118th Congressional session (H.R. 3600 and H.R. 3601) and develop a Senate companion.

⁹ Earlier this year, SVA partnered with Google and their *Grow with Google* program to offer student veterans a head start in career employment while in school with one of Google's Career Essentials certificates, see <https://studentveterans.org/info-google-certificates/>

¹⁰ See more information at <https://www.ibxfoundation.org/pdfs/reports/service-scholars-program.pdf>

Career, Family Stability, and Civic Leadership

SVA's *State Policy Landscape Project* (2025), now operating across eleven states, represents one of the most comprehensive efforts to map how state policy environments shape veteran education and workforce outcomes.¹¹ Through mixed-methods research combining legislative audits, institutional scans, and focus groups with student veterans, higher education staff, and employers, the project identifies systemic gaps that federal programs alone cannot resolve.¹² The findings reveal recurring challenges across diverse regions: workforce transition supports that lack creativity to support student veterans, inconsistent implementation of credit for prior learning (CPL) policies, fragmented advising structures that separate academic and benefits counseling, and underutilized state veterans' commissions that often lack the resources or statutory authority to coordinate higher education and workforce initiatives.¹³ In some states, veterans are still required to repeat coursework for competencies already acquired through military training and experience, resulting in unnecessary debt, delayed graduation, and lost productivity. In others, the absence of state-level coordination leaves campus veteran programs isolated, with limited access to workforce data or employer partnerships. H.R. 1446, the *Validate Prior Learning to Accelerate Employment Act*, would seek to identify or develop assessments that measure an individual's prior knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences. These assessments would be used to award credit toward, or to grant, a recognized postsecondary credential that is valued by employers in the state for recruitment, hiring, retention, or advancement, and that aligns with an in-demand industry sector or occupation. SVA is dedicated to working with this Committee to create a Senate counterpart that would recognize veterans for their skills and competencies earned while in military service and grant them CPL within their academic or employment journey.

Overall, the outcome of this system should be enduring success with veterans seeing their value in their education, stable employment, strong families, and civic engagement. More than half of all student veterans are married, and more than half are parents.¹⁴ Education after service is therefore a family enterprise. To that end, SVA supports S. 610, the *Ensuring VetSuccess on Campus Act*, introduced by Senators Blumenthal and Rounds, and expansion of the VA *Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership* (VITAL) program to ensure every state and campus has access to a VetSuccess on Campus and VITAL counselor. These counselors bridge VA benefits and health services with campus support, addressing both academic and family needs.

When veterans' families are stable, persistence rises, and intergenerational benefits follow. A child who watches a parent complete a degree with the GI Bill learns that service and education form a single legacy. Beyond individual households, veterans enrich civic life. Research shows that veterans volunteer, vote, and serve in leadership roles at higher rates than their civilian peers.¹⁵ Each successful transition therefore yields both private and public dividends.

¹¹ Kinch, A. K., & Barlet, T. (forthcoming) A Comparison of 11 State Policy Landscapes in Supporting Student Veterans. Student Veterans of America (on file with authors).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See generally Student Veterans of America. (2023). SVA Census Survey [Annual survey report].

¹⁵ See Wilson, S. E., & Ruger, W. (2020). Military Service, Combat Experience, and Civic Participation. *Armed Forces & Society*, 47(3),

Interagency Data Modernization

Every improvement described above depends on data that moves with the veteran. At present, those data remain scattered across agencies, trapped in silos that do not communicate.¹⁶ VA holds benefit utilization files. The Department of Defense tracks separations and military training records. The Department of Education maintains enrollment data through institutional reporting, and the Department of Labor houses workforce outcomes. None of these systems speak to each other in real time.

As a result, even the most basic questions about veterans in higher education remain difficult to answer and requires a data-matching agreement with a several-years delay.¹⁷ There is no definitive source for how many veterans are currently enrolled, how many persist to graduation, or how their degrees connect to employment outcomes. Each agency sees only part of the picture. For example, a service member may complete technical coursework in cybersecurity while on active duty, use the GI Bill to earn a bachelor's degree after separation, and later receive Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) assistance for certification in cloud computing. Today, those three experiences exist in separate databases that cannot be linked without manual reconciliation. That fragmentation prevents policymakers from evaluating how federal programs interact across the full continuum of education and employment.

SVA recommends that the Department of Veterans Affairs lead an interagency transition data task force, working in coordination with the Departments of Defense, Education, and Labor to design and pilot an interoperable, privacy-protected data framework. Within twelve months, the task force should produce a pilot linking at least one cohort's separation data, GI Bill enrollment, and early employment outcomes. The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs would then receive a report detailing key barriers, the authorities required for broader data-sharing, and a roadmap for national scale.

Such a pilot could begin with a discrete population. For example, the pilot segment could focus on all service members separating from the Army in fiscal year 2026 who use the Post-9/11 GI Bill within twelve months. That cohort could be tracked securely through VA education records and linked to Department of Labor wage files to evaluate employment alignment and earnings trends during school and post-graduation. This limited but concrete example would demonstrate how data integration can illuminate program effectiveness without new statutory

551–585. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327x20934885> and Bowen, G. L., Martin, J. A., Mancini, J. A., & Nelson, J. P. (2015, April 24). Civic engagement and sense of community in the military (Research Brief). Institute for Veterans and Military Families. <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Civic-Engagement-and-Sense-of-Community-in-the-Military.pdf>

¹⁶ O'Hanlon, C. E., Williams, K. M., Lotspeich-Yadao, M., Brennan, M., Salazar, H. M., & Maury, R. V. (2025, January 14). Finding and using policy-relevant data about veterans: Availability, accessibility, and avenues for improvement (Research Report No. RR-A1363-17). RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1363-17/RAND_RRA1363-17.pdf

¹⁷ Radford, A. W., Bailey, P., Bloomfield, A., Webster, B. H., Jr., & Park, H. C. (2024, February). First look: Post-9/11 GI Bill outcomes for enlisted veterans. American Institutes for Research. <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/First-Look-Post-9-11-GI-Bill-Outcomes-Enlisted-Veterans-February-2024.pdf>

entitlements or excessive cost. This effort is low-cost, primarily from staff time and cost in coordination across agencies, aligned with existing federal data-modernization initiatives. SVAC retains clear oversight, with VA as lead, ensuring jurisdiction remains with the Committee.

A functioning data bridge, with the support of extant technological solutions such as Lighthouse API, would allow policymakers to see in near real time whether benefits translate into stable careers, household security, and community well-being. It would also shift congressional oversight from anecdote to evidence, giving this Committee the tools to assess impact rather than intention. For the veteran, it would mean a single, verified record of service, education, and credentials, which are data that follow them with consent and privacy by design. Such a system would make transition not only navigable but measurable, ensuring that every investment in those who served can be evaluated for the outcomes it delivers.

Conclusion

A grateful nation honors its veterans not only with gratitude or benefits, but with systems that work—systems built on efficiency, evidence, and trust. Every generation of veterans has expanded the American promise, and the test of our gratitude is whether the nation’s institutions expand with them. SVA stands ready to partner with Congress, the VA, and the broader federal enterprise to ensure that those who once defended the nation are supported by one that functions as well as they once did in uniform.

The three recommendations before this Committee, transition forecasting, Work-Study modernization, and an interagency data task force, represent a roadmap to that goal. Each is cost-effective, actionable in the near term, and measurable through outcomes this Committee can oversee. Together, they would reduce friction at the point of transition, align education with the workforce needs of the nation, and strengthen the families whose stability determines veterans’ long-term success. They would also create a model of governance that integrates the precision of data, the compassion of community, and the innovation of civil society.

Veterans are one of the nation’s most reliable engines of economic, civic, and moral growth. When government and civil society work in concert, that engine powers more than individual achievement. It drives innovation in classrooms, entrepreneurship in communities, and renewal in the public institutions that hold our democracy together. Building systems that work for veterans is how a grateful nation sustains itself.

○

The continued success of veterans in higher education in the Post-9/11 era is no mistake or coincidence. In our Nation’s history, educated veterans have always been the best of a generation and the key to solving our most complex challenges. Today’s student veterans carry this legacy forward.

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the Committee Members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans, military-connected students, their families, caregivers and survivors.