

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0803

January 18, 2018

The Honorable David J. Shulkin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

Mr. Secretary

I write today to request an update on the status of two agreements the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced with the Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA).

Since 2009, more than 1.7 million service members, veterans and their family members have used over \$75 billion in Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to finance their higher education. For many veterans who attend in-state public colleges and universities, these hard-earned benefits can cover the full cost of tuition, fees, books, and housing over 36 months, enabling these veterans to graduate with little or no student loan debt. However, as a recent Student Veterans of America (SVA) report points out, it is a "myth" to assume Post-9/11 GI Bill beneficiaries do not accrue student loan debt in college. For example, not all student veterans qualify for 100 percent of the benefit, while many Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients often attend more expensive private colleges and universities. For these student veterans, borrowing may be the only option to continue and complete their programs of study.

Despite the expansiveness of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, policymakers currently lack veteran-specific data on a number of indicators, including student loan debt. In response, VA and FSA announced an agreement in November 2016 to "share data that will be used to calculate cohort default rates, median loan debt, and repayment rates at the aggregate and institutional level for veterans and their beneficiaries who are using Post 9/11 GI Bill education benefits and who also receive Federal student loans." VA and FSA pledged to report this information on the GI Bill Comparison Tool website to "help veterans make more informed decisions about where to invest their time, money, and benefits."

Additionally, VA and FSA announced a separate agreement in November 2016 to help notify individuals about a student loan forgiveness program for service-disabled veterans with a VA disability compensation rating of 100 percent. Under this agreement, VA would provide data to FSA to "identify veterans with service-connected disabilities and help them apply more effectively for Total and Permanent Disability discharge of their student loans." This commonsense agreement will better ensure that service-disabled veterans are accessing an educational benefit that has been earned in many cases through extraordinary sacrifice in service to our country.

I believe the timely implementation of both agreements is critical to protecting our nation's veterans and will provide policymakers with a better understanding of the challenges facing Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients. Therefore, I write today to request a status report on the implementation of both agreements by February 8, 2018. Specifically, I ask that you include in your response when the veteran-specific student loan data will be publicly available on the GI Bill Comparison Tool and whether VA has provided information to FSA in order to help improve outreach to 100 percent service-disabled veterans who may be eligible for student loan discharges.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of our nation's veterans. I look forward to your response and to continue working with you and your team on these important matters in the 115th Congress.

With warm personal regard, I am,

*Many thanks!
all the best!*

Sincerely yours,



Tom Carper
U.S. Senator