

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

December 12, 2025

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins:

We again write to express concerns and disappointment with how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) failed to pay required education benefits on time to over 75,000 veterans, their families, and survivors during this fall semester. This is our third letter to you on the topic, and we have yet to receive responses to either our October 9th or November 14th letters. You have failed to meet deadlines in both letters and did not provide requested information. This lack of response was brought up directly to VA officials last week in a Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity hearing and in multiple meetings between VA and Congressional staff. We continue to wait for your response and will enclose the previous two letters, in case you have not seen them in your reading binder.

VA has failed to communicate with veterans, their families, survivors, the public, and Congress on this issue. This continues to create uncertainty and financial stress for those using Chapter 35 Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) benefits. These payment failures are not merely a bureaucratic inconvenience; they are a direct failure to uphold the sacred promises made to those who earned these veteran benefits. The fact that VA is continually failing to publicly communicate creates the appearance that you and this administration are attempting to hide this problem.

On December 5th, VA finally conducted the congressional briefing it had previously canceled with no notice on October 1st. During that briefing VA acknowledged that it had never informed Congress of this issue impacting 75,000 beneficiaries, which started in August, until that very briefing on December 5th. VA has been aware of this major problem impacting the finances of thousands for months, but felt it unnecessary to communicate it to the veterans, families, and survivors impacted or to Congress and the public.

We urge you, or another Senate-confirmed appointee, to appear at the Economic Subcommittee hearing on December 16th, 2025, to explain VA's failure to deliver mandatory benefits to veterans, their families, and their survivors, and VA officials' choice to not inform or communicate with beneficiaries, the public, and Congress.

In addition to written responses to all three letters on this topic, we expect you or your designee to be prepared to answer the questions posed in previous letters, as well as the following:


1. How long were beneficiaries' Chapter 35 claims pending? Please break out by average, median, quartiles, and the extremes for both original and supplemental claims submitted for or during the fall 2025 semester. Please provide a percentage pending 30/60/90+ days.
2. Are there any original or supplemental applications for Chapter 35 benefits for the fall 2025 semester still pending?
3. Why were VA staffing furlough decisions out of line with White House guidance, which hindered VA Education Services' ability to deploy automation and work through this backlog, thereby delaying the delivery of benefits to survivors attending school?
 - a. According to White House guidance, employees supporting funded programs, like mandatory VA education benefits, were to be deemed essential and continue to execute those programs.¹ Why did that not occur?
 - b. Who approved the VA furlough staffing plan?
 - c. Which officials were required to approve the return of VA Education Service User Acceptance Testing Group staff necessary to run the Digital GI Bill (DGIB) testing environment and field DGIB releases?
4. What were the impacts of these delays in paying benefits on veterans, their families, and their survivors?
5. What communications did VA send directly to the beneficiaries; to veterans, families, and survivors generally; to the media; and to Congress on this issue?
6. VA Education Services has already started receiving supplemental claims for spring 2026 semester. How will VA be prioritizing processing original claims, supplemental claims that have already been reconciled, and supplemental claims requiring reconciliation? How quickly should beneficiaries expect VA to process and pay out their Ch 35 benefits?
7. How many VA Education Services claims processors left the agency through the Deferred Resignation Program, Voluntary Early Retirement, or natural attrition since January 2025 and were unavailable to process claims during the October lapse in appropriations?

Additionally, we again request an immediate action plan from VA detailing the scope of those impacted, how VA is going to make them whole, timeline for a resolution of both the 75,000-case backlog for Chapter 35 and delayed Post-9/11 GI Bill payments, and how VA will be preventing any recurrence of this failure in the future.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Frequently-Asked-Questions-During-a-Lapse-in-Appropriations.pdf>

We look forward to your immediate and comprehensive response.

Sincerely,



Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Chris Pappas
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity



Nikki Budzinski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Technology Modernization