

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CHAIRMAN MIKE BOST

Veterans Readiness and Employment Improvement Act – Rep. Van Orden

Background:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operates the Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program, which assists service-connected veterans in finding and maintaining employment. Veterans are assigned a counselor to help them pursue education, employment, independent living, or entrepreneurship. Last year, over 180,000 veterans utilized this program. The VR&E program collaborates with VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) to support veterans and service members who are transitioning from military to college life. Counselors must hold a master's degree in a relevant field of social work to be a VR&E or VSOC counselor. This requirement has made it more challenging to hire staff for VSOC positions, especially when the VSOC position has different duties than a VR&E counselor. Due to the high volume of veterans in the program, counselors are often overburdened and may not be able to provide care to veterans in need.

Current law also does not require VA to provide a phone number or hotline for veterans with VR&E specific questions. The VR&E program already faces severe wait times of up to seven months, and counselors neglecting their veteran caseloads and not providing proper oversight on their cases only worsens wait times. Furthermore, veterans seeking to enroll in a non-college degree flight training program through the Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program cannot currently use VR&E funds for this purpose even though their GI Bill counterparts are able to use their benefit for these programs.

The Veterans Readiness and Employment Improvement Act, would enhance support for veterans as they pursue their education by creating a VR&E specific hotline for veterans and would also require each VA Regional Office to display a name, email and phone number online for veterans with VR&E-specific questions. This legislation would also allow for more hiring and retention of VSOC counselors by relaxing job requirements. This bill would also expand the definition of rehabilitation programs to include non-degree flight training programs. This legislation would streamline veterans' education benefits and allow veterans enrolled in the VR&E program to pursue more opportunities after their service.

The Message:

- By reducing VSOC caseloads and eliminating the master's degree requirement in social work, we can dramatically boost support for veterans on campuses and improve their adjustment to civilian life.
- Establishing a dedicated VR&E hotline would allow veterans to call and receive correct information without having to sit on hold at a call center that may not be able to answer their questions.
- With only 30% of pilots being veterans, veterans have the unique ability to help reduce the pilot shortage commercial airlines face today by using their education benefit for any degree-granting or non-degree-granting flight training program.