



MILITARY HOUSING ALLOWANCE: ELIMINATE DISPARITY IN TREATMENT

Since its inception in 2008, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has supported Veterans in their pursuit of higher education. This support has included tuition, fees and housing support. However, the military housing allowance (MHA) levels are currently reduced by half for students taking distance education courses compared to students taking in-residence courses. There is no support to justify this disparate treatment between those taking in-residence courses and those taking distance education courses, and, as such, the difference in MHA should be eliminated.

Veterans want distance learning to be a viable option for them and the demand for distance learning programs reflects this. Student engagement and satisfaction with online learning is also increasing, with a recent study showing 79% of students surveyed found distance education to be as good or better than in-residence courses.ⁱ As our current generation of service members transition out of the service, we must honor their desire for flexible, modern and successful education formats and afford them full use of the benefits they have earned; as well as ensure they are prepared to be competitive in the modern civilian workforce.

Differences in housing allowances have an unfair implication of workload. The payment of the housing allowance is tied to the modality of education as well as the percentage of training time.ⁱⁱ The MHA disparity between modalities as it stands now implies that a student taking in-residence courses is automatically assumed to be working fewer hours and earning less money than a student taking that same course in a distance modality, thus the distance student needs less financial support. However, this is a false premise. A student should be spending just as much time on school work in an in-residence course as a distance course. If an institution is properly accredited (which it should be as a VA-accepting institutionⁱⁱⁱ), the institution should be upholding the standards of their accrediting body. These standards include how many "contact hours" certain credits require, and they should be equal regardless of which format the course is taught. (See, for example, the Carnegie Unit.^{iv}) The difference in how many hours a student Veteran works and how much money they earn is more a function of their unique situation and less so the modality in which they choose to attend class. Course modality is a poor measure of how much financial support a student Veteran may require to be successful in their education. If contact hours are the same, the school workload is the same and thus the training time payment should be equal between in-residence and distance learners.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress acted, and public law 116-128 was passed temporarily eliminating the housing allowance distinction between in-residence and distance courses.^v During the pandemic, Veteran students that were forced to move to distance-only courses, as a result of institutions limiting in-residence course options, have been afforded the full housing allowance. This temporary response has brought to the forefront the unequal treatment of Veteran students that previously took online-only courses.



The disparity in MHA leads to unfair treatment of some student Veterans for no justifiable reason. When an institution meets all other eligibility standards, the method of learning should not be a factor in the benefits a Veteran receives. As such, NAIMES recommends that Congress enact legislation, and the VA implement policy, to establish an equitable standard – one that is independent of course modality – by which to pay MHA to all Post-9/11 GI Bill beneficiaries.

NAIMES Member Institutions

American Public University System
Brandman University, Chapman
University System
Campbell University
Capella University
Central Michigan University
Central Texas College
Coastline Community College
Columbia College
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
Grantham University
Park University

Pikes Peak Community College
Saint Leo University
Southwestern College
Thomas Edison State University
Troy University
University of Alaska System
University of Maryland Global Campus
University of Oklahoma
University of Phoenix
Wayland Baptist University
Webster University

ⁱ Wiley Education Services - Online College Students, 2020, <https://edservices.wiley.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/OCS2020Report-ONLINE-FINAL.pdf>

ⁱⁱ How is my housing allowance paid if I'm not a full-time student?
https://gibill.custhelp.va.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/1480 Retrieved May 15th, 2021

ⁱⁱⁱ How does a school get a program approved for GI Bill benefits?
https://gibill.custhelp.va.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/1481/~how-does-a-school-get-a-program-approved-for-gi-bill-benefits%3F Retrieved May 17th, 2021

^{iv} Carnegie Unit <https://www.edglossary.org/carnegie-unit/#:~:text=The%20standard%20Carnegie%20unit%20is,course%20of%20an%20academic%20year> Retrieved May 16th, 2017

^v PUBLIC LAW 116–128—MAR. 21, 2020 <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ128/PLAW-116publ128.pdf> Retrieved May 15th, 2021