NAIMES
National Association of Institutions for Military Education Services
"educating our people in uniform"

DoD Tuition Assistance – Increase the Per-Credit Hour Cap, Sever the Connection Between the Per-credit Hour Cap and the Annual Funding Ceiling and Establish the DoD TA program as a Congressional Special Interest Item

The National Association of Institutions for Military Education Services (NAIMES) works to protect the educational rights and needs of service members. As part of our continued work to improve military education programs, we write in support of modifications to the Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1322.25, which covers Tuition Assistance (TA). Specifically, NAIMES recommends that the $250 per credit hour cap be increased and decoupled from the $4,500 annual ceiling for TA benefits. This change would enable greater choice and flexibility for service members to pursue higher education, particularly in graduate-level and non-standard programs, while maintaining the annual ceiling in accordance with current fiscal policies. Additionally, NAIMES writes to recommend that TA funding, which is appropriated by the Congress to the individual military services, be designated as a Congressional Special Interest Item.

Argument for Increasing the Per-Credit Hour Cap and Severing the Connection Between the TA Cap and Ceiling

The existing TA program is a valuable resource for active-duty military personnel seeking to further their off-duty education. However, the $250 per credit hour cap put in place in 2002 has not kept pace with the rising costs of higher education. Over the last 20 years, annual tuition costs at public, four-year institutions have risen more than 158%, to over $10,560, and at private, four-year institutions tuition has risen more than 116%, to over $39,400 (College Board, 2023). Higher education costs have significantly eroded the purchasing power of the $250 per credit hour cap and the $4,500 annual ceiling for both undergraduate and graduate level programs, and this reduces the choices available to service members. In many cases, particularly when attending an institution which charges tuition above the $250 per credit hour cap or pursuing post-baccalaureate educational opportunities, service members are forced to take on a personal financial burden.

The Case for Making TA a Congressional Special Interest Item

To ensure that TA funding is used to support service members' off-duty voluntary education programs, NAIMES recommends that the military services' TA funding, appropriated in the services Operations & Maintenance accounts, be designated as a Special Interest Item subject to additional Congressional oversight and reporting to restrict those TA funds being reprogrammed by the military services.

As part of the 2025 appropriations language process for the Department of Defense's Tuition Assistance program, NAIMES supports the following policy changes:

- **Decouple the $250 per credit-hour cap from the $4,500 annual ceiling**: Service members should have the freedom to apply their full annual TA allotment without being restricted by the $250 per credit hour cap. This would be especially beneficial for those

pursuing non-traditional programs or post-baccalaureate level coursework where the per-credit cost often exceeds the current cap.

- **Raise the TA annual ceiling to keep pace with Pell Grant award levels**: To address rising educational costs, we recommend increasing the TA annual ceiling to $5,000 to better align with the Pell Grant award, which is set at $7,395 for the 2024-2025 academic year.
- **Designate Appropriated TA Funding as a Congressional Special Interest Item**: To ensure that TA funds are used to support service members off-duty voluntary education pursuits, NAIMES recommends designation of the TA appropriation as a Special Interest Item, with direction that the military services spend at least 90% of appropriated funding in support of TA. Additionally, NAIMES calls for a comprehensive study on the impact of TA on military recruitment, retention, readiness, and post-service reintegration to society. This study would provide valuable data to inform future discussions about adjusting the per-credit cap and annual ceiling, as well as managing the services' execution of TA funding appropriated by the Congress.

NAIMES is encouraged by constructive, ongoing discussions with stakeholders across the military voluntary education community about the potential for increasing the TA cap from $250 to $300 per credit hour in 2026, and NAIMES supports an increase in the per-credit hour cap. If implemented, this increase would alleviate some of the financial burden on service members and better support their pursuit of higher education. However, we believe that decoupling the cap from the ceiling is a necessary and related step to ensure that service members can fully leverage their educational benefits, particularly in higher-cost programs. NAIMES recommends that Tuition Assistance (TA) be designated as a special interest item for congressional consideration to ensure that TA funds are restricted from reallocation for purposes outside of voluntary education.

These actions represent logical and necessary steps to modernize the Tuition Assistance program and align it with the current landscape of higher education. Greater flexibility for service members using their TA benefits will enable access to a wider range of educational opportunities, ultimately enhancing their professional development, military readiness, and preparation for ultimate transition back to civilian life. NAIMES looks forward to collaborating with DoD and other stakeholders to advocate for these important policy changes and to ensure that our military members receive the educational support they deserve.

NAIMES Member Institutions

WILL ADD UPON COMPLETION