

the **veteran** advocate

an initiative of the Consortium of Michigan Veteran Educators

SCOs: Are you Ready for the Forever GI Bill?

Gail Bock, Henry Ford College; Kara Fields, Macomb Community College

March 2018

In 2015-2016, Michigan's public colleges and universities took in \$58,862,415 in Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits alone.¹

In 2017, the Consortium of Michigan Veterans Educators (CMVE) formed a knowledge community connecting practitioners who perform school certifying procedures for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits paid to postsecondary institutions. These School Certifying Officials (SCOs) have been loosely connected as a network of professionals for decades with SCOs receiving ongoing training from VA throughout the year. Each state is assigned one of four Regional Processing Offices for VA claims as well as its own in-state Education Liaison Representative (ELR) and State Approving Agency (SAA) to expedite processing for the billions of dollars paid out annually through these benefits. Despite these resources, VA certifying processes are tedious and change with regularity making a formalized community of practice within CMVE an opportunity to further facilitate training and cross-institutional sharing among Michigan's colleges and universities. The SCO Knowledge Community Chair on the CMVE Steering Committee provides leadership for this network with extensive peer input.

A major wave of changes to Post 9/11 GI Bill benefit processing is imminent with the recent passage of the "Forever GI Bill" which sought to lift the 15-year post-service timeframe for GI Bill usage (for service members discharged after Jan 1, 2013) among other expanded provisions, including eligibility to certain reservists, Purple Heart recipients, and others previously excluded from the GI Bill. There are a number of other critical changes to the benefit, including several procedural updates at the institution. The following resources are available to assist SCOs in preparing for these updates and Appendix A "Forever GI Bill/Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 Handout" summarizes the numerous changes with items of particular importance highlighted throughout.

- [Helping Veterans Succeed](#), American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)
- ["Forever GI Bill – A Section by Section Analysis,"](#) Student Veterans of America (SVA)
- Michigan contacts:
 - CMVE SCO Knowledge Community Chair, Gail Bock: gjbock@hfcc.edu
 - MI Education Liaison Representative (ELR) contact information: MI.ELR.VBASTL@va.gov, 313.471.3693
 - MI State Approving Agency (SAA) contact information: MISAA@michigan.gov, 517.241.8315
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Resources:
 - [Forever GI Bill – Harry W. Colmery Educational Assistance Act](#), includes [breakdown of updated benefits](#).
 - [School Training & Information Resources](#), includes [School Certifying Official Handbook](#)
 - SCO Hotline: Contact Gail, Kara, or your ELR for the number. It cannot be published or shared with students.
 - Forever GI Bill contact info: forevergibill.vbavaco@va.gov, 1-888-GI-BILL-1 (1-888-442-4551).

¹Source: [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#) (IPEDS)



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MICHIGAN VETERANS EDUCATORS

The mission of the Consortium of Michigan Veteran Educators is to serve all Michigan public community colleges and universities in their efforts to support student veterans, military service members, and their family members. The CMVE has been generously funded in 2015-2018 by a grant from [The Kresge Foundation](#) with special project support from the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC's) [Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit](#). For additional information, see the CMVE website at www.micmve.org.

Appendix A:

Forever GI Bill / Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 Handout

Kara Fields, Macomb Community College

Effective August 1, 2018 – unless otherwise noted.

All service noted must be on or after 9/11/2001.

Sec. 101: **Medical Care Time for National Guard or Reserves**

Time spent receiving medical care for National Guard or Reserve service when activated after 9/11/01 will count as Post 9/11 qualifying time.

Sec. 102: **Purple Heart after 9/11/01**

All Purple Heart recipients are eligible for 100% of the benefit regardless of the number of years or days served. This will not reimburse those who used their benefits but moving forward the recipient will be 100% eligible.

Sec. 103: **Inclusion of Fry Scholarship & Purple Heart recipients for Yellow Ribbon (YR)**

Yellow Ribbon eligibility now includes Purple Heart Recipients and Fry Scholarship.

Sec. 104: **Increases YR program for recipients enrolled over ½ time or while active duty**

YR program will be eligible for programs leading to degree at more than a half time basis or while on active duty. Effective 8/1/2022.

Sec. 105: **Increases rate of benefit eligibility (National Guard or Reserves)**

90 days-6 months, increased from 40% to 50%.

6 months-12 months, increased from 50% to 60%.

Effective 8/1/2022.

For more details about increases, view VA links below:

Reserve Time Counted Towards Post-9/11 GI Bill

Service under 10 US.C 12304a and 12304b counts toward Post-9/11 GI Bill

Time ordered to active duty to receive authorized medical care, be medically evaluated for disability, or complete a Department of Defense health care study

Yellow Ribbon Extension to Active Duty Servicemembers, Fry, and Purple Heart Recipients

Sec. 106: **REAP Sunsetting Service Credited to Post 9/11**

Recipients who lost REAP eligibility can transfer it into Post 9/11.

Effective immediately.

Sec. 107: **Monthly Housing Stipend calculation change**

Changes the housing amount to the location where the student is participating in the majority of their classes.

Sec. 108: **Reduces entitlement use for tests and certifications**

Entitlement used for certifications and national tests will be prorated based on actual costs as compared to one month of pay. This is for ALL individuals currently using GI Bill® education benefits.

Note: Also includes national tests that evaluate prior learning and provide an opportunity for course credit.

Sec. 109: **Restoration of Benefits for School Closures**

In the event of school closures or disapprovals, restoration of benefits is allowed. This allows the continuance of educational assistance payments for the remainder of semester, or up to 120 days, whichever is less. It restores a portion of enrollment if the recipient does not receive credit or lost training time, and monthly stipend can be extended through the training time.

Effective 90 days after enactment of Act and covers programs discontinued after 1/15/2015. Process is still TBD by VA and DoE.

Note: This will include ITT – recipients need to contact VA with questions.

Sec. 110: Transfer upon death of originally designated dependent or veteran

Allows vet to transfer entitlement to another dependent upon death of dependent who received the benefit (TOE). Also allows dependent (TOE) to transfer to another dependent upon death of service member/veteran. Deaths apply on or after 12/1/2009.

Sec. 111: Scholarship for STEM degree extensions

Application process TBD by 8/1/2018. Recipients whose benefits are near or have exhausted, have completed at least 60 credits in an approved field, and apply for assistance can be awarded for up to 9 additional months of scholarship. Priority will be given to those 100% eligible and those who require the most credit hours for completion. Max scholarship of \$30,000 per student. These additional months cannot be transferred. Effective 8/1/2019.

More information on STEM can be found at this [VA Link](#).

Sec. 112: Elimination of 15-year expiration date

Eliminates the current 15-year time limitation to used GI Bill for those service members discharged on or after 1/1/13. Effective immediately.

Note: Recipients may receive multiple Certificate of Eligibilities (COE) from VA. This should be sorted out soon.

Sec. 113: Prorate housing for activations

VA to prorate housing provided to reservists called up for active duty during the middle of a month. This stops the reservist from losing the full month of VA housing allowance.

Sec. 114: GI Bill Reporting Requirements

Requires the Secretary of VA to submit reports from educational institutions on student performance to congress NLT March 1 each year. Effective immediately.

Sec 115: Money for VA's IT Implementation

Authorizes \$30 million to improve GI Bill claims processing and for VA to complete the rules-based processing system for these claims. Effective for FY 2018 and 2019.

Sec 116: High Technology Pilot Program

VA to conduct a 5-year pilot program "high technology courses" with institutions who enter into contract with VA. Colleges would be incentivized for graduation and employment. Effective by 180 days after 8/1/2018.

Sec 201: Extension of Work Study

Repeals the sunset date in the law and allows work study to be used for outreach to student veterans and to assist SAA. Effective immediately.

Sec 202: Consolidation of DEA benefits

Reduces the months of entitlement from 45 to 36 months. Applies to all Ch. 35 benefit users who become eligible after 8/1/2018.

Sec 203: Increased DEA Payments

Increases monthly pay by \$200 per month. Effective 10/1/2018 and applies to all Ch. 35 benefit recipients.

Sec 301: SAA Funding Increase

Adjusts SAA funding from \$19M/year to \$22M/year for 2018 and to \$23M/year each subsequent year. VA can provide an additional \$3M a year to SAAs from general operating account. Effective FY 2019.

Sec 302: GI Bill use for Accredited Independent Study programs.

Area career and technical education school for post-secondary level education. Effective immediately to all Post 9/11 recipients.

Sec 303: Enrollment Data Collection

VA must include priority registration for certain veterans in the GI Bill Comparison Tool Data. Effective immediately.

Sec. 304: SCO Funding

This increases the reporting fees up to \$16 per GI Bill user. Requires schools with 100+ GI Bill users, to establish a specific account for tracking reporting fees. All fees are required to be used for specifically for GI Bill implementation.

Sec. 305: SCO Training

VA and SAA to provide requirements for training for SCOs and provides authority for VA to disapprove programs/schools if a school does not ensure the SCO is trained. Effects schools with 20+ GI Bill users and SCO is a primary responsibility.

Sec 306: **VA's Advisory Committee on Education Authority** has been extended until December 2022.

Sec 307: Vets Success on Campus (VSOC)

VR&E program VSOC administered and overseen by VR&E is now codified in the law.

Sec 308: Remaining GI Bill months

VA must give schools ability to view remaining GI Bill months for each recipient and must allow a veteran to opt out.

Sec 309: Delayed Start Program certification

Provides flexibility for an SCO in reporting term dates: If the first day of a course does not start on the first day of a term, the SCO may certify the course as beginning on the first day of the term.

Sec 310: SAA Survey Authority

Directs SAA to focus the majority of their resources on “risk-based surveys and other such oversight” during surveys. Effective immediately.

Sec 311: **Requires SAA effectiveness and performance audit** (expected to be done within the first year)

Sec. 401: Increases eligible time

- Reserve and National Guard service under 12304, 12304(a), and 12304(b) orders count toward GI Bill® eligibility time. Effective 8/1/2018, and is retroactive for orders after June 30, 2008. Back pay is not an option for those who already used it. Time will be available as of 8/1/18. It is retroactive to the original passage of Post 9/11. See [VA website](#) for more details. .