

Explanation of Forever GI Bill®

The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, otherwise known as the Forever GI Bill®, is a sweeping legislation that makes numerous changes to the GI Bill®. While most of the changes come in the form of expansions of benefits, there are also decreases to some benefits and increases in administrative requirements. This document will work to explain what the changes to the GI Bill® entail and when they will go into effect. Please note that the VA is still working on the specifics of how many of these changes will operate and any application procedures.

Immediate:

1. Benefit: Elimination of 15-year Limitation to use

Details: The 15 year limitation on the use of Post-9/11 benefits is now removed. This means that Servicemembers can use their 36 months of Post-9/11 eligibility any time between the date that they leave Active Duty Service and the day they die. Servicemembers who left Active Duty service on or after 01 January 2013 are affected by this change to the benefit.

2. Benefit: REAP Eligibility Credited Towards Post-9/11 GI Bill® Program

Details: The Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) was a program similar to the Montgomery GI Bill® (MGIB) that provided a set monthly benefit to members of the Reserves to receive an educational benefit. This program was originally developed in 2005 to cover Service Members who at the time could not receive MGIB benefits, as these were restricted to Servicemembers who completed three years of Active Duty Service. In 2016, the National Defense Authorization Act set a sunset date for REAP of 25 November 2019. About 90% of REAP beneficiaries have either switched to Post-9/11 benefits or exhausted their benefits. The remaining 10% of beneficiaries would lose their benefits, and this expansion of benefits is focused on these few individuals (about 20,000 nationwide)

3. Benefit: Assistance to Students Affected by School Closures and Disapprovals

Details: Certain for-profit universities have recently closed around the country, leading to students losing the benefits they already expended at these universities. This portion of the law allows students in this position to have the benefits expended during such a course of study restored. In order for the benefits to be restored, the student must be unable to complete their program of study due to: the closure of the educational institution; the disapproval of the course of study or a course that is necessary as part of the program by reason of new law, regulation, or policy after the student enrolled in the program; or the student did not receive credit, or lost training time, toward completion of the program being pursued. In the alternative, the VA can treat such a course of study as being approved on a case-by-case basis if the VA determines that the entire program was disapproved for one of the reasons previously mentioned and it would be in the best interests of the student to simply continue the program of study. The VA may also continue to offer a monthly housing allowance to students under the Post-9/11 GI Bill® if their school closed or was disapproved during a certified term.

4. Benefit: Changes to Licensing and Certification Charges

Details: If a student wishes to use Post-9/11 benefits to pay for the GRE, LSAT, or other tests, they have to give up a full month of benefits in order to do this. This means that student lose thousands of dollars' worth of benefits in order to pay for a test costing a few hundred dollars. This change will allow

the VA to charge students at a prorated rate in order to use benefits to pay for testing. Instead of losing a whole month, a formula will determine how many days' worth of benefits a test is worth and then only charge a student for those days.

5. Benefit: Expansion of Work-Study

Details: Under the previous law, the VA work-study program was set to expire on 30 June 2022. This expiration date has now been removed and the work-study program will be authorized for as long as GI Bill® programs exist.

6. Benefit: Use of G.I. Bill at Technical Schools

Details: The Post-9/11 GI Bill® is now authorized for use for independent study degrees from career and technical education schools.

7. Benefit: Priority Enrollment Designation

Details: The VA will provide information to Servicemembers and Veterans on the availability of priority enrollment at institutions of higher education.

01 January 2018

1. Benefit: Monthly Housing Allowance

Details: Post-9/11 housing rates currently track the Basic Housing Allowance (BAH) rate of the Department of Defense. This change to the law has housing rates track with the DoD's reduced BAH rate. Students currently receiving the higher rate will continue to receive that rate. Students who begin their course of study and using benefits after the effective date will use the lower rate.

01 August 2018

1. Benefit: Purple Heart Recipients

Details: Servicemembers who received a Purple Heart on or after 01 September 2001 and were honorably discharged from service will receive Post-9/11 GI Bill® benefits at the 100% rate of eligibility.

2. Benefit: Reserve Component Benefits

Details: Guard and Reserve Servicemembers performing service under 10 U.S.C. 12304a and 12304b will receive Post-9/11 benefits for service under this title. This will apply to any service under this title performed on or after 30 June 2008.

3. Benefit: Eligible Reserve Duty

Details: When a Reservist of any component is or was ordered to Active Duty in order to receive authorized medical care after 01 September 2001, this duty will count towards Post-9/11 GI Bill® eligibility.

4. Benefit: Informing Schools of Entitlement

Details: The VA will make available to educational institutions information about the amount and type of educational assistance available to students. The goal is to provide this information to schools through a secure networked system. Any beneficiaries would also be given the opportunity to opt out of such a system for privacy reasons.

5. Benefit: Pilot Programs for Technology Courses

Details: The VA will develop a pilot program to provide eligible Veterans who are entitled to any educational benefit with the opportunity to enroll in high technology programs of education. The types of programs required will be determined based on the needs for training and skills sought by employers in relevant fields and industries.

6. Benefit: Reserve Component Housing Allowance Changes

Details: Monthly housing allowance will be pro-rated based on days in class and time in service. This means that if a Reserve student goes on active duty and receives a housing allowance, then rather than remove the housing allowance for the whole month, the VA will pro-rate the housing allowance based on the time in service and time in class.

7. Benefit: Changes to Transfer of Benefits

Details: Currently if benefits are transferred to a dependent and either the dependent or sponsor dies, then the benefits are permanently assigned to that dependent. This change allows sponsors or dependents to transfer benefits from dependent to dependent even if the sponsor or original recipient dies.

8. Benefit: Housing Allowance Based on Campus Location

Details: Currently, the location of the main campus of a university is the location that is used to calculate monthly housing allowance. This change makes it so that the location of a branch campus a student attends would act as calculation point for housing allowance. There will be no change to housing allowance for students taking classes online.

9. Benefit: Extension of Yellow Ribbon Benefits to Fry Scholarship and Purple Heart Recipients

Details: Fry Scholarship Recipients and Purple Heart Recipients will be able to utilize Yellow Ribbon Scholarships in order to cover the difference between the Post-9/11 GI Bill® tuition cap and what they are being charged. Currently, the legislation initiating the Post-9/11 GI Bill® Yellow Ribbon Program does not authorize Fry Scholarship to receive this benefits. For Purple Heart Recipients, this portion of the law allows them to access Yellow Ribbon benefits immediately with the activation of their ability to receive benefits.

10. Change: SCO Training Requirement

Details: Currently the VA requires that School Certifying Officials (SCOs) complete a brief online training course before being certified as SCOs. Under the new legislation the VA is required to ensure that all SCOs are trained. The only description in the law is that the VA will work with state approving authorities in order to develop the requirements of training.

01 October 2018

1. Benefit: Decrease to DEA Entitlement and Increase to Benefit

Details: Currently, Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) provides students with a monthly stipend for 45 months of eligibility. This change to the law decreases the initial eligibility of beneficiaries to 36 months. Only individuals who apply for CH 35 DEA benefits after 01 August 2018 will be affected by this change. At the same time the actual payments made to students will be increased by about \$200 a month.

01 August 2019

1. Benefit: Additional Eligibility for STEM Courses

Details: In order to support STEM education and the increased requirements of completing STEM degrees, the VA is authorized to provide an additional 9 months of Post-9/11 eligibility to certain individuals. In order to be eligible for this expansion of benefits, a student must: have or will soon exhaust Post-9/11 benefits; apply for assistance; are enrolled in a STEM program that requires more than the standard 128 credit hours; and has completed at least 60 standard semester hours, or has earned a post-secondary degree in one of these fields and is enrolled in a program leading to a teaching certification. STEM degrees include degrees in biology, physical science, science technologies, engineering, engineering technology, computer science, health professions, agricultural science, or natural resource science. The VA will provide up to \$30,000 in extra funding over the course of the 9 additional months. Yellow Ribbon is not authorized during these additional months and 100% Post-9/11 is given priority for receiving benefits.

01 August 2020

1. Benefit: Consolidation of Benefits Levels

Details: Rather than maintaining the current structure of benefits levels ranging from 40% to 100% based on months of active duty service, the VA will take several actions. First, it will remove the 40% tier and move the 50% tier to cover the at least 90 days, but less than 6 months category. The 60% category is now expanded from its original 12 to 18 month range to a 6 to 18 month range. All other tiers remain the same.

01 August 2022

1. Benefit: Extension of Yellow Ribbon Benefits to Active Duty Servicemembers

Details: Active Duty Servicemembers will be able to utilize Yellow Ribbon Scholarships in order to cover the difference between the Post-9/11 GI Bill® tuition cap and what they are being charged. Currently, the legislation initiating the Post-9/11 GI Bill® Yellow Ribbon Program does not authorize Active Duty Servicemembers to receive this benefits.