New GI Bill implementation plan announced

On the heels of payment delays, VA says student veterans will receive full benefits in 2019

Department of Veterans Affairs officials have promised that by Dec. 1 of this year, the major problems plaguing student veterans will be solved—namely, incorrect payment amounts and technology glitches that caused delays in educational benefits delivery.

“For veterans dependent on the [Forever] GI Bill as their sole source of income while attending school, the delays in payments have been devastating,” said National Commander Dennis Nixon. “The VA owes these veterans the benefits they were promised and should ensure nothing like this happens in the future.”

It was a tumultuous fall semester for student veterans using the Forever GI Bill. Part of the new GI Bill changed calculations for veterans’ housing allowances, now requiring the allowances to be based on the ZIP code where students attend classes rather than defaulting to the main campuses.

When the VA attempted to make this adjustment in order to meet the planned Aug. 1 deadline for implementation, its IT systems failed. At the same time, the VA was also working to process a high volume of veterans’ education claims for the fall semester. This, in turn, led to major delays delivering
veterans’ monthly housing allowances—a benefit many rely on heavily to cover daily living expenses as they pursue an education.

In an effort to correct course, VA officials announced they are pushing back implementation to Dec. 1, 2019, freeing up resources to get students paid on time.

“Redesigning the way [the Veterans Benefits Administration] calculates Post-9/11 GI Bill housing rates during a busy academic season was like flying a plane while building it, and that was unfair and frustrating to veterans and taxpayers,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement. “That’s why we are resetting our implementation of the law for the next year to ensure we get the technology and formula right to put veterans first.”

For now, Wilkie also noted, “Post-9/11 GI Bill housing allowances will be paid at the [Department of Defense Basic Allowance for Housing] rate, which in many cases will be equal to or higher than their current payment.”

The VA is seeking a new contractor for the project and hopes to have these changes in place by next December, in time for the spring 2020 semester.

The VA has issued a statement to students who are experiencing “financial hardships” by the payment delays, instructing them to contact the VA Education Call Center at 888-442-4551.