Honorable Congress<<man or woman>> <<name>>:

On behalf of the veterans residing and attending colleges in Washington State, we are writing to thank you for the bipartisan enactment of a key piece of legislation that was critically beneficial to Washington’s community colleges and more specifically to our student veterans. Introduced in the Senate in early March, S. 3503, authorized the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to treat courses converted to distance learning by reason of emergencies and health-related situations in the same manner as courses pursued in-residence at educational institutions.

More than 12,000 student veterans and spouse/dependents (utilizing transferred benefits) received VA education benefits in our most recently completed academic year while attending one of our state’s 34 community or technical colleges. Based on the new law, Post-9/11 GI Bill ® students who pursue resident courses converted to an online modality solely due to COVID-19 will continue to receive the Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) rate for resident training. The law only authorizes this special authority through December 21, 2020. Without the special authority extension, our student veterans and their dependents would only receive 50% of the national average MHA rate as opposed to their local MHA rates, which are based on the cost of living for the area resident courses are pursued.

With the recent uptick in confirmed virus cases and the potential for a second wave, we are concerned with the sunset date of the enacted legislation. Course registration begins in November for our colleges’ winter quarter that commences in January. To be more responsive assisting our student veterans and their families, we respectfully request extending the sunset date to June 30, 2021 and allowing the stipulations in S. 3503 be applied to any class whose modality has changed for any declared national emergency, whichever date is later. That is, if the declared national emergency were to end during the 2020-21 academic year, the sunset date would be June 30, 2021. An extension will ensure that these students are accorded the same opportunities as our students who are not utilizing veterans benefits, but are receiving traditional federal and/or state financial aid that does not place a restriction on course modality. In addition, allowing the sunset date to be at least until the end of the academic year will allow both student veterans and institutions of higher education to better plan during these uncertain times.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Representative Matt Boehnke (R) Representative Dave Paul (D)

[8th Legislative District](http://app.leg.wa.gov/districtfinder/displaydistrict/8) [10th Legislative District](http://app.leg.wa.gov/districtfinder/displaydistrict/8)

Washington State House of Representatives Washington State House of Representatives

Assistant Professor Director of Community Relations

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