

# The Post-9/11 GI Bill Is One Step Closer to a Major Overhaul

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**Update: On August 16, 2017, President Trump signed the Forever GI Bill into law.**

In a rare moment of bipartisanship, on Monday, July 24, the United States House of Representatives unanimously passed the [Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017](#), colloquially deemed the “Forever GI Bill,” which would amend the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (the Post-9/11 GI Bill) and significantly enhance education benefits provided to eligible military veterans.

Introduced by representatives Phil Roe (R-Tenn) and Tim Walz (D-Minn), the bill would eliminate the provision that currently requires eligible veterans to use tuition assistance benefits within 15 years of active-duty service. Veterans who became GI-Bill eligible after January 1, **2013**, would no longer be bound by the 15-year time cap, enabling them to use their education-assistance benefits for the rest of their lives. Those who became eligible for GI-Bill benefits *prior to January 1, 2013*, would remain bound by the 15-year time limit.

In addition to providing a lifetime option to exercise education benefits, the Forever GI Bill would also grant automatic eligibility to Purple Heart recipients regardless of their duration of service; expand eligibility for National Guard members, reservists and surviving family members; expand eligibility for veterans to enroll in independent study (notably including distance education) programs offered by certain public and nonprofit technical or career institutions; and provide additional funding to recipients pursuing science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) degrees.

The bill would also partially restore educational benefits used by veterans who attend institutions that close, such as occurred with ITT Technical Institute and Corinthian Colleges. The bill allows eligible participants to maintain their GI-Bill entitlement for the semester that the institution shut down, as well as up to four months of additional monthly housing allowance (MHA).

The MHA is one area of the bill that has been the subject of some criticism. Specifically, the costs associated with the expanded coverage provided by the Forever GI Bill will be offset in part by a relatively small reduction in the MHA. More significantly, the bill fails to address an inconsistency in MHA eligibility for distance education students, who would continue to be limited to roughly half of the MHA available to students enrolled in residential courses. Neither the House bill nor the version being considered in the Senate address this issue.

The Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs unanimously approved the GI-Bill expansion on July 26, and a full Senate vote is expected prior to the August recess. Cooley is monitoring this important piece of legislation and will disseminate new information as it becomes available.

**Lisa Bureau** counsels clients on institutional eligibility, compliance and program review/audit resolutions and specializes in the resolution of complex regulatory matters arising from the participation of institutions in the federal programs of student financial assistance.

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