



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF VETERANS'  
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS**

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**Veterans' Education Programs  
Issues and Legislative Talking Points  
2026**

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## **OVERVIEW**

In 2026, NAVPA's federal advocacy is focused on fixing unintended harm, strengthening delivery systems, and protecting veterans from administrative risk, so that education benefits function as Congress intended: reliably, fairly, and in service of student success.

NAVPA's legislative priorities reflect both long-standing areas of concern and issues intensified by recent federal disruptions, including the 2025 government shutdown. While this agenda introduces a clearer framework of strategic pillars, it is important to emphasize that all issues previously identified by NAVPA remain active priorities. The structure below is designed to bring focus and coherence, not to narrow the scope of advocacy.

Across every priority in this agenda, NAVPA approaches advocacy as a solutions-oriented partner, grounded in field-based insight from School Certifying Officials (SCOs) and veterans program administrators who work directly with students and federal systems every day.

## **LEGISLATIVE ALIGNMENT**

Many of NAVPA's long-standing priorities align with bipartisan legislation currently before Congress, including **H.R. 1458, the Veterans Education and Technical Skills Opportunity Act of 2025**. This legislation reflects several of the operational and policy challenges identified by professionals in the field, particularly around student protections, institutional compliance, and system accountability. NAVPA supports the advancement of this bill where its provisions directly advance the priorities outlined in this agenda.

More broadly, NAVPA approaches legislative engagement as a technical partner to Congress; offering practical insight on how policy changes will affect students, institutions, and federal systems in real-world implementation. Our aim is to help ensure that well-intentioned reforms translate into durable, workable solutions for the veterans and families who depend on these benefits.

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## ***PILLAR I – Protect Veterans from Administrative and Financial Harm***

### **Issue: Student Debt and Financial Harm Caused by Administrative Failures**

#### **NAVPA's Concern:**

Student veterans continue to face unexpected financial hardship due to retroactive eligibility determinations, overpayment recoupment, and delayed benefit processing. During the 2025 government shutdown, these challenges were magnified by system slowdowns and staffing shortages that left students without timely payments and, critically, without reliable information about when relief would come.

To better understand the scope of impact, NAVPA conducted a national survey of students using VA education benefits. In just a few days, more than 2,400 students responded, with nearly half reporting disruptions or delays in their benefit payments.

#### **Why This Matters:**

For many students, VA education benefits are not supplemental, they are essential. Delays in housing stipends, subsistence allowances, or dependents benefits place immediate pressure on rent, childcare, and basic living expenses. When those delays are compounded by a lack of communication, uncertainty becomes as damaging as the delay itself.

#### **NAVPA Urges Congress and Federal Agencies to:**

- Establish statutory and regulatory guardrails that limit recoupment from students when overpayments result from federal administrative error and the student acted in good faith.
- Clarify responsibility for overpayments and debt creation to ensure students are not penalized for processing failures beyond their control.
- Improve the predictability of benefit disbursement timelines by strengthening communication protocols and contingency planning during system disruptions.

#### **Desired Outcome:**

Veterans are protected from financial harm caused by system failures, and students receive timely, transparent information that allows them to plan and remain enrolled.

## **Issue: Federal Policy Misalignment for Students Activated During Enrollment**

### **NAVPA's Concern:**

When servicemembers are activated during a period of enrollment, federal policies governing VA education benefits, academic grading, and student financial transactions are not aligned. As a result, students and institutions are forced into outcomes that satisfy one set of rules while creating financial loss, benefit disruption, or inappropriate academic results under another.

One clear example of this misalignment is the current requirement to issue an "Incomplete" grade when a student is called to service. This requirement reflects benefit-processing assumptions, not academic reality, overriding faculty judgment and student preference and failing to account for courses where an incomplete is pedagogically inappropriate.

### **Why This Matters:**

Servicemembers should not be penalized, financially or academically, for fulfilling military obligations. Mandating institutions to issue an "Incomplete" grade undermines academic freedom and student agency, particularly when many servicemembers would prefer to withdraw and re-enroll upon return rather than carry unresolved coursework while deployed.

### **NAVPA Urges Congress and Federal Agencies to:**

- Clarify that the use of an "Incomplete" grade is an option, not a mandate, for students activated during enrollment.
- Preserve faculty and institutional discretion in determining appropriate academic outcomes when military service interrupts education.
- Establish clear statutory protections that preserve GI Bill® entitlement for students activated during periods of enrollment.
- Align refund, withdrawal, and benefit policies across VA, DOD, and Department of Education to eliminate contradictory requirements.
- Ensure institutions are not required to return funds for services already delivered when interruption is due to military service.

### **Desired Outcome:**

A coordinated federal policy framework that protects students from benefit loss and financial disruption, while preserving academic autonomy and student choice when military service interrupts education.

### **Legislative Alignment:**

Section 4 of H.R. 1458 advances this priority by clarifying options for students called to service and strengthening statutory consistency across federal education benefit programs.

## ***PILLAR II – Strengthen the Delivery Infrastructure of Veterans’ Education Benefits***

### **Issue: Unrealistic Compliance Timelines and Administrative Burden**

#### **NAVPA’s Concern:**

Institutions face increasingly complex compliance and reporting expectations that divert staff time away from direct student service. During the 2025 government shutdown, these pressures intensified as schools absorbed the impact of delayed certifications, unresolved cases, and increased student inquiries without federal support.

#### **Why This Matters:**

Effective oversight depends on strong institutional compliance, but compliance systems must be designed to support integrity without sacrificing student service capacity. When administrative demands overwhelm frontline staff, students experience delays, confusion, and reduced access to assistance.

#### **NAVPA Urges Congress and Federal Agencies to:**

- Reassess statutory and regulatory timelines to ensure they reflect operational reality.
- Provide flexibility that maintains accountability while enabling institutions to serve students effectively.
- Develop continuity plans that sustain essential support functions during federal shutdowns.

#### **Desired Outcome:**

A compliance environment that maintains oversight integrity without undermining student service, even in times of federal instability.

#### **Legislative Alignment:**

Sections 5 and 6 of H.R. 1458 advance this priority by establishing reasonable compliance survey timelines and requiring timely notification of SCO Handbook updates.

## **Issue: Capacity and Role Clarity for VA Education Support Staff**

### **NAVPA's Concern:**

Education Call Center staff, the SCO Hotline, and VR&E counselors serve as the frontline connection between federal programs and the students and staff who rely on them.

During the 2025 government shutdown, the furlough of these employees meant that at the very moment delays and confusion peaked, students and schools were left without anyone to call for answers. What should have been a temporary disruption instead revealed a systemic vulnerability in how essential education support services are staffed and sustained.

### **Why This Matters:**

When communication channels go silent, the impact extends beyond inconvenience. Students are unable to make informed decisions about enrollment, housing, or employment. Institutions are left trying to support students without authoritative guidance. For students with disabilities who rely on VR&E counselors, the loss of individualized support creates disproportionate harm.

### **NAVPA Urges Congress and Federal Agencies to:**

- Designate student-facing education support functions as mission-critical services during federal disruptions.
- Establish continuity-of-operations requirements for the Education Call Center, SCO Hotline, and VR&E.
- Strengthen surge capacity and cross-training to maintain student communication even during emergencies.

### **Desired Outcome:**

Veterans retain access to clear, accurate guidance and individualized support, especially during periods of system stress.

## ***PILLAR III – Ensure Transparency, Fairness, and Accountability***

### **Issue: GI Bill® Complaint and Feedback Systems**

#### **NAVPA’s Concern:**

The current GI Bill® complaint and feedback systems allow unvetted, unresolved, or misdirected complaints to be publicly posted on the GI Bill® Comparison Tool, often without sufficient context, verification, or opportunity for institutional response. As a result, institutions can face reputational harm and increased compliance scrutiny based on information that may not accurately reflect violations of law or policy.

NAVPA members have reported that complaints are frequently triggered by misunderstandings of benefit rules, VA processing errors, or frustration with delays; yet these complaints are still attributed to institutions. In some cases, unsubstantiated complaints have led to Risk-Based Surveys and additional administrative burden, even when no wrongdoing occurred.

#### **Why This Matters:**

Veterans deserve accurate, reliable information when choosing where to use their education benefits. Institutions deserve fair process and due consideration before public feedback is used to influence student decisions or trigger enforcement action. When complaint systems lack transparency and procedural safeguards, they undermine trust on all sides.

#### **NAVPA Urges Congress and Federal Agencies to:**

- Require that all complaints be vetted and verified before being posted publicly.
- Establish a formal process that allows institutions to review, respond to, and resolve complaints prior to publication.
- Ensure that complaints stemming from VA administrative errors or system failures are not attributed to institutions.
- Align feedback retention policies with existing federal record-keeping standards to ensure fairness and proportionality.
- Prevent the use of anonymous complaints in ways that deny institutions the ability to address student concerns meaningfully.

#### **Desired Outcome:**

A GI Bill® feedback and complaint system that is transparent, accurate, and fair. One that protects veterans’ right to informed choice while ensuring institutions are held accountable through due process rather than public presumption of fault.

## **Issue: Accountability in System Changes and Policy Updates**

### **NAVPA's Concern:**

Major changes to VA education benefit systems and policy guidance are frequently implemented without sufficient advance notice, coordination, or operational readiness. When these changes encounter problems, there is no consistent framework for ownership, communication, or corrective action. The result is not simply administrative inconvenience, but a breakdown in governance: schools and students absorb the impact of system failures that originate outside their control.

Unlike issues of delayed payment or overpayment, this concern centers on how change is managed, not the financial consequences alone. Even when no immediate financial harm occurs, poorly executed system or policy updates create confusion, conflicting guidance, and compliance risk that destabilize benefit delivery.

### **Why This Matters:**

Veterans' education benefits function as a mission-critical public service. When system changes are rolled out without adequate planning and accountability, frontline staff become the default help desk, students receive inconsistent information, and institutions shoulder reputational and regulatory risk. Over time, this erodes trust in the very programs designed to support veterans' educational success.

### **NAVPA Urges Congress and Federal Agencies to:**

- Establish formal change-management standards for major system and policy updates affecting veterans' education benefits.
- Require advance notice and coordinated communication to institutions, call centers, and students prior to significant changes.
- Implement clear incident-response protocols when system changes fail, including timely public acknowledgment and guidance.
- Ensure that compliance expectations are adjusted appropriately when failures stem from federal system or policy changes.

### **Desired Outcome:**

A veterans' education benefit system in which major changes are implemented with transparency, coordination, and accountability; so that governance failures do not become student or institutional crises.

## **ABOUT NAVPA**

Founded in 1975, the National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators (NAVPA) is a national professional association representing the campus-based professionals who administer veterans' education benefits at approved education and training providers across the United States. NAVPA members are responsible for the day-to-day operation of veterans' education programs, including certifying enrollments, maintaining compliance with federal and state requirements, and supporting students who VA education benefits.

NAVPA's membership is composed of school certifying officials, veterans' services administrators, and higher education staff whose roles focus on the implementation and oversight of VA education programs. In addition to benefit administration, many NAVPA members oversee dedicated physical spaces such as veterans' centers and resource hubs, and coordinate campus-based programs and services that support veterans, service members, and military-connected families.

As a professional association, NAVPA serves as a forum for training, information-sharing, and professional development for those responsible for administering veterans' education benefits and managing veteran-focused campus programs. This includes support for best practices related to compliance, student services, program development, and the operation of physical spaces that foster connection, access to resources, and community for military-connected students and their families.

NAVPA's members represent a broad range of institutions, including public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, technical institutions, and other training providers. In the most recent NAVPA membership year, the association included 387 member institutions. Based on the most recent data available through the VA GI Bill® Comparison Tool, these institutions collectively served approximately 320,000 students using GI Bill® benefits.

According to the same data source, NAVPA member institutions received over \$1.25 billion in Post-9/11 GI Bill® tuition and fee payments in the most recent reporting period. These figures reflect only a portion of total VA education benefit utilization and do not include additional programs such as Dependents' Educational Assistance or Veteran Readiness and Employment.

Through this professional network, NAVPA promotes consistency, accuracy, and best practices in the administration of veterans' education benefits and the delivery of campus-based services. In doing so, NAVPA supports the professionals who support those who serve, who have served, and their families.

GI Bill® is a registered trademark of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). More information about education benefits offered by VA is available at the official U.S. government Web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill>.