

# GI Bill Payment Delays Negatively Impacting Military Learners

## Implementation and Technical Issues, Exacerbated by the Federal Government Shutdown, Are Driving VA Benefits Backlog

### Introduction

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits are a critical resource for military learners pursuing higher education and workforce training. Combined, VA education and training programs serve over one million beneficiaries and provide more than \$14 billion in education benefits.<sup>1</sup>

Ongoing implementation and technology issues, combined with the prolonged government shutdown, are negatively impacting students who utilize the three largest education programs administered by the VA:

- Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) program
- Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program
- Post-9/11 GI Bill

VA leaders are aware of the issues but so far have not publicly released any information. Lawmakers and advocates are pressing for greater transparency and a timely resolution.<sup>2</sup>

Colleges and universities with students who use VA education benefits should be aware of the payment delays and the uncertainty around when payments will be fully processed. Institutions are doing what they can to support military learners on their campuses, including allowing these students to enroll in courses for the next term while they wait for payments to cover any remaining account balances.

This issue brief provides a brief summary of these programs and what is known about their current status.

### Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) Program

The DEA, or Chapter 35 benefits, provides monthly payments to cover costs or expenses incurred while pursuing education and training. Beneficiaries of Chapter 35 include spouses or children of veterans who have died, are missing, or have a permanent and total service-connected disability. The DEA program served 262,792 beneficiaries in fiscal year 2024 (FY 2024) who collectively received more than \$2 billion in payments.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Most recent figures from FY 2024, combining education program and Veteran Readiness and Employment data. See: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Veterans Benefits Administration: Annual Benefits Report for Fiscal Year 2024*, <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2024-abr.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Letter to Secretary Doug Collins from Senator Richard Blumenthal, Representative Mark Takano, et al., [https://democrats-veterans.house.gov/imo/media/doc/secva\\_letter\\_re\\_ocla\\_and\\_casework\\_during\\_shutdown.pdf](https://democrats-veterans.house.gov/imo/media/doc/secva_letter_re_ocla_and_casework_during_shutdown.pdf); Hope Hodge Seck, "VA tech glitch halts GI Bill payments to thousands, advocates say," *Military Times*, November 3, 2025, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2025/11/03/va-tech-glitch-halts-gi-bill-payments-to-thousands-advocates-say/>; Veterans for Education Success, "Veterans Education Success Sounds the Alarm on GI Bill Payment Delays," November 7, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zu8E5bZzZu8>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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In late summer 2025, VA transitioned to a new payment system for disbursing Chapter 35 benefits, which resulted in delayed payments to beneficiaries. While this issue predated the federal government shutdown, VA did not send any communications to beneficiaries or institutions about the delays. Now, due to the shutdown, the GI Bill hotline has been closed, leaving students with no way to contact VA to report missing payments or request assistance. According to the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), there may be up to 75,000 missing payments.<sup>4</sup>

VA has reported that they expect to clear the current backlog by late November or early December of this year, but the prolonged government shutdown will continue to delay timely communication with beneficiaries and the public.

### **Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program**

The VR&E program, or Chapter 31 benefits, helps veterans and service members with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, secure, and build a new career. Specialized counselors, known as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs), help veterans determine their employment goals and develop individualized service plans to achieve them. For veterans who require training as part of their plan, VR&E pays for tuition, fees, books, and necessary supplies. Veterans who enroll in training also receive a monthly subsistence allowance to assist them with living expenses. The VR&E program served 144,249 unique beneficiaries in FY 2024 who collectively received \$2.1 billion in payments.<sup>5</sup>

While VR&E provides many veterans with support, persistent capacity challenges—particularly around access to counselors, or VRCs—have created significant barriers to utilizing program benefits. In December of 2024, Student Veterans of America testified in the U.S. House of Representatives on these longstanding challenges.<sup>6</sup> Now, due to the shutdown, VRCs have been furloughed, which has had a clear impact on program administration.

### **Post-9/11 GI Bill**

The Post-9/11 GI Bill, or Chapter 33 benefits, provides comprehensive educational benefits to veterans and their eligible dependents, including tuition, housing, books and supplies, and other expenses. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is the largest education benefit program, with 573,732 beneficiaries in FY 2024 collectively receiving nearly \$9.7 billion in payments.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to the federal government shutdown, there were no systemic issues with Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits. Since Oct. 1, 2025, however, some students using Chapter 33 benefits have reported missing payments. It is unclear why these payments may be missing or delayed, and VA has not provided any information publicly about Chapter 33 processing issues. Due to the shutdown, the GI Bill hotline has been closed and students do not have a way to contact VA to verify payments, fix any billing errors, or request other assistance.

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<sup>4</sup> Hope Hodge Seck, “VA tech glitch halts GI Bill payments to thousands, advocates say,” *Military Times*, November 3, 2025, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2025/11/03/va-tech-glitch-halts-gi-bill-payments-to-thousands-advocates-say/>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Veterans Benefits Administration: Annual Benefits Report for Fiscal Year 2024*, <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2024-abr.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Testimony of Student Veterans of America, “Examining the Effectiveness of the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Program,” Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, November 11, 2024, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/VR/VR10/20241211/117750/HHRG-118-VR10-20241211-SD003.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Veterans Benefits Administration: Annual Benefits Report for Fiscal Year 2024*, <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2024-abr.pdf>.