

November 28, 2017

The Honorable Phil Roe
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tim Walz
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz,

On behalf of associations representing thousands of aviation businesses and hundreds of thousands of pilots, we appreciate the committee's continued work on HR 4149, legislation to improve the delivery of veterans' flight training benefits. While the current bill contains numerous provisions to improve the program's efficiency, the proposed capping of program payments undermines the important goal of helping our nation's veterans enter a field where they are desperately needed.

The U.S. civilian general aviation sector generates more than one million jobs and more than \$200 billion for the nation's economy — and it is seeking pilots. Today's flight training programs prepare tomorrow's pilots of police and firefighting helicopters, air ambulances, charter and corporate aircraft, and airliners.

Working as a civilian commercial pilot is a rewarding career. However, it requires thorough, in-depth, and complex training. Without the aid of their promised veterans' benefits, most veterans can ill afford such training. We believe that as a nation, we have an obligation to meet the needs of veterans. This is especially true when it comes to benefits promised them, including providing financial assistance for achieving their educational goals.

We are encouraged that HR 4149 provides needed improvements for structuring veterans' flight training benefits. This includes an accelerated payment provision to provide greater flexibility and a more efficient funding mechanism to help veterans complete their flight training. HR 4149 also provides coverage for obtaining a private pilot license when it is incorporated into the requirements of a professional flight training program. Additionally, HR 4149 provides flexibility to public schools in allowing them to contract for flight training, which in turn makes aviation training more available to interested veterans.

We support the need for improved fiscal responsibility by the government and strongly support tightening the existing regulations of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to curb abuses by a minority of flight schools affiliated with collegiate degree programs.

However, despite these positive improvements, we cannot support this bill as written. Unlike how other degree programs at public colleges or universities are treated, the bill caps payments for flight training programs which unfairly impacts the ability of veterans to pursue well-paying jobs in the civilian aviation sector.

Capping funds available for flight training degree programs virtually guarantees that veterans seeking to use their GI Bill benefits to enter the aviation industry will have insufficient funds to achieve their goals. They will either abandon their pursuit or be burdened with significant personal debt through either expenditure of personal funds or taking on of student loans. This will harm veterans and limit their employment opportunities in the aviation industry.

It is unfair and discriminatory to single out for these funding caps veterans seeking employment in aviation. These caps deprive them of the ability to pursue collegiate flight training, a common path to a career as a commercial pilot.

We urge the Committee to remove the discriminatory cap on flight training at public institutions and to keep the promises that will allow veterans their choice of career.

We remain committed to working with the Veterans' Affairs Committee and all of Congress to ensure our nation delivers on its commitment to our veterans, who have honorably and unselfishly served our nation.

Sincerely,



Sally Veith
Executive Director
Air Medical Operators Association



Matthew S. Zuccaro
President & CEO
Helicopter Association International



Mark R. Baker
President & CEO
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association



Martin H. Hiller
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Peter J. Bunce
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