

# Veterans Education Newsletter

FOR SCHOOL CERTIFYING OFFICIALS

St. Louis RPO ([www.varostlouis.com](http://www.varostlouis.com))

Department of Veterans Affairs

February 2001

## Saint Louis VARO Gets New Director

Gary D. Williams was appointed Director of the St. Louis VA Regional Office on November 19, 2000. Prior to this appointment, he had served as Acting Director of the VA Regional Office in Newark, New Jersey; Assistant Director of the VA Regional Office in Muskogee, Oklahoma; and Adjudication Officer of the Muskogee Office. He began his VA career in 1972 as a Veterans Benefits Counselor.

Mr. Williams received a Bachelor's degree from Southeastern Oklahoma State University and has done graduate work in business administration. He is an alumnus of Leadership VA.



Born and reared in central California, Mr. Williams moved with his family to Oklahoma in 1963. He served 3 years in the United States Marine Corps, including a 1 year tour of duty in Vietnam. He is a member of the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Mr. Williams and his wife, Elizabeth, have three children, Erin, Julie, and Bethany.

### Get Information and Forms on the Internet

VA Education Service operates a web site to keep certifying officials and students informed about a wide variety of topics relating to the use and administration of the VA education programs. The site, located at [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov) includes links to sites for electronic certification (VACERT), VA forms, regulations and provides a way to e-mail benefit inquiries to the Regional Processing Office in St. Louis. There is a certifying official's page where school officials can get on an electronic mailing list to receive the latest news on benefit program changes.

### School Reporting Fees Mailed Last Week of January

The Code of Federal Regulations provides for payment of a **school reporting fee** to those institutions having active VA students during the calendar year. The reporting fee is \$7, however, if an advance payment has been issued, the reporting fee is \$11. This fee is to help defray the cost of processing VA certifications and reports.

Approximately 30 days after receiving the payment, you should receive a listing of the students for whom the payment is made. The listing will give you the abbreviated names of the students on "active status" during the calendar year, their VA file number and the type of benefit they are receiving. At the bottom of the list is a summary of the total students for each category, regular and advance pay, which provides the basis for the payment amount.

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### Due to a programming error this year, all chapter 1606 student were paid at the \$7.00 rate even if an advance pay was made.

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This list also may not include all of your active students during the year. Two possible reasons for this may be that the student's award for VA benefits was processed after December 31, or that the student was enrolled at less than half time. Your institution is entitled to a reporting fee for these students also.

If you have students that your school was not paid or was underpaid, you may claim the additional amounts due by writing to your **Education Liaison Representative**. (See page 2) Please list the student's name, claim number, the type of benefit they receive, and the amount you are claiming.

### Schools Need to Inform VA of New Certifying Officials

It is important for you to remember to notify the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) of any change in school certifying officials. The name of the Certifying

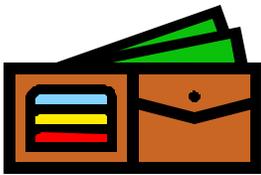
Official on the Enrollment Certificate, VA Form 22-1999 is compared with the name designated by the school. If they do not match, the enrollment will not be processed.

To prevent processing delays, please notify us of any changes as soon as possible. A Designation of Certifying Official(s), VA Form 22-8794 is available on the Certifying Officials web page at [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov).

The completed form should be sent to your ELR not to the St. Louis RPO. VA will provide any technical training needed. Instruction guides and information about the certification process can be obtained by calling your **Education Liaison Representative**. To locate the ELR for your state:

Visit the Education Service School Officials  
Web Page at:  
<http://www.gibill.va.gov>

## VA to Pay Tuition Assistance to Some Service Members for Off-Duty Training and Education



**Background:** Under 10 U.S.C. §2007 each service department in most cases would pay up to 75% of the tuition or expenses charged by the service member's school. This program is commonly known as **Tuition Assistance**. Eligible service members had to find additional financing, or pay the remaining expenses from their own pockets. A service member eligible for the MGIB wasn't allowed to receive both Tuition Assistance and the MGIB for the same course.

**New Provisions** in PL 106-398 passed last fall allow each service department to pay up to 100% of the tuition or expenses charged by the service member's school. It also allows a service member eligible for MGIB to elect to receive MGIB benefits for all or a portion of the remaining expenses *if a service department pays less than 100%* of the tuition and expenses. This program is known as "**Top-Up.**"

A service member who receives MGIB benefits as a result of this provision will receive a lower rate of basic educational assistance once he or she is discharged. The full-time monthly rate will be the rate that would have been payable had he or she not used the MGIB in service for tuition assistance, reduced by the amount of payments received in service, divided by 36.

A service member can receive a basic educational assistance allowance under this provision for a maximum of 36 months. This 36 months of entitlement is separate from a service member's 36 months of MGIB entitlement.

**Effective Date:** This provision is effective for enrollment periods beginning on or after October 30, 2000.

## Change in High School Requirement for CH 30 and 1606 eligibility

In the past, to be eligible for MGIB-Active Duty, students had to have a high school diploma, equivalency certificate, or complete the equivalent of 12 semester hours leading to a college degree *before the end of their first obligated period of service*. To be eligible for MGIB-Selected Reserve, they had to complete those requirements *before completing Initial Active Duty for Training*.

Under the new law, students now have a significant extension of time to meet this requirement. Now, they can apply for benefits any time after they meet this requirement.



*This provision applies only if:*

- The student wasn't eligible for MGIB before November 1, 2000, because he/she didn't meet the high school requirement, **OR**
- Entered active duty on or after November 1, 2000, met other MGIB eligibility requirements, but doesn't yet meet the high school requirement.

*If either of the above statements applies and:*

The student hasn't yet received a high school diploma or equivalent, or completed 12 semester hours leading to a college degree, **he/she now has a chance to meet this requirement**

Once the student has met the high school or equivalency requirement, he/she can go ahead and apply for benefits. If benefits were denied before, they can reapply.

## Reporting Tuition & Fees Helps Prevent Processing Delays

We have noticed during the past several months that there have been an increased number of *callbacks*. *Callbacks* are claims that cannot be processed until we call the school to obtain a clarification of the enrollment certification or missing information. We have noticed the over half of the callbacks we currently have are enrollments where tuition & fees information, necessary to process the claim, was not provided.

Callbacks are very time consuming and take away from valuable processing time. **You can help** by making sure you provide tuition & fees in all cases where the enrollment is less than 1/2 time. (5 credits or less.) **Remember, when in doubt, show the tuition and fees!**

## Using Education Benefits for Licensing or Certification Tests

**Background:** Previous law prevented VA from approving or paying education benefits to students taking licensing or certification tests. In order for a student to receive education benefits, the student must have been pursuing an approved program of education. Licensing and Certification tests did not meet the criteria of a program of education required by law.



**New Provision:** PL 106-419 revises the term “program of education” to include licensing or certification tests. Under the provisions of the new law:

- ✧ Licensing or certification tests are those which demonstrate an individual’s possession of the knowledge or skill required to enter into, maintain, or advance in employment in a predetermined and identified vocation or profession.
- ✧ Licensing or certification tests and the licensing or credentialing organizations that offer such tests must be approved by the State Approving Agency (SAA) before VA can pay benefits.
- ✧ Benefits under chapters 30, 32 or 35 are payable for licensing or certification tests. **Benefits are not payable under 10 U.S.C. chapter 1606.**
- ✧ The amount of educational assistance payable for a licensing or certification test is the lesser of \$2,000, the fee charged for the test or the amount of the individual’s remaining entitlement.
- ✧ The number of months of entitlement charged to an individual for a licensing or certification test is determined by dividing the total amount of educational assistance paid to an individual by the full-time monthly institutional rate of educational assistance an individual would otherwise be paid. For chapters 30 and 32, the full-time monthly institutional rate includes the additional amount payable for “kickers.”

**Effective Date.** This provision applies to licensing and certification tests approved and taken on or after March 1, 2001.

## Additional Opportunity Available for Certain VEAP Participants to Enroll in Chapter 30

**Background:** Under previous law, only a limited number of chapter 32 participants (and participants under section 903 of Public Law 96-342) could elect chapter 30. These are persons who qualified for chapter 30 based on category III or IVA eligibility requirements.

**New Provision:** PL 106-419 permits additional chapter 32 (and section 903) participants to elect chapter 30. The requirements are:

- The individual was a participant under chapter 32 (or section 903) on or before October 9, 1996.
- The individual has continuously served on active duty since October 9, 1996, through at least April 1, 2000.
- During the one-year period beginning on November 1, 2000, and ending on October 31, 2001, the individual must make an irrevocable election to receive chapter 30 benefits.

Each service department will establish election procedures.

- Before applying for payment of benefits, the individual must have completed the requirements of a secondary school diploma (or equivalency certificate) or have successfully completed the equivalent of 12 semester hours in a program of education leading to a standard college degree.
- The individual, when discharged or released from active duty, is discharged or released with an honorable discharge.
- The individual must have his or her basic pay reduced by \$2700 or must make a \$2700 lump-sum payment. The individual will have 18 months from the date of his or her election to make this payment. If the service department does not collect the full amount before discharge, VA may collect any remaining balance.

*NOTE: The collection of \$2700 is an eligibility requirement.*

## New Legislation Changes Interval (Break) Payment Requirements

**Background.** Previously, VA education benefits could be paid (with some exceptions) for breaks between school terms, semesters, or quarters, if the breaks didn't exceed a full **calendar** month.

**New Provision.** PL 106-419 allows payment of VA education benefits for a break between school terms under the following conditions.

1. The break doesn't exceed eight weeks, and
2. The terms before and after the break are not shorter than the break.



**Effective Date.** This provision is effective November 1, 2000.

**Determining the Length of a Term or Interval.** To determine the length of a term or interval, count the **actual number of days** in the term or interval. Do not subtract the begin date from the end date to arrive at the number of days. This will yield an inaccurate number of days.

### General Rules for Interval (Break) Payment

VA **will** pay for an interval between terms in the following instances:

- An interval between terms at the same school that **does not** exceed eight weeks (56 days) in length **and** the terms before or after the interval are at least as long as the interval.
- An interval between terms that is 30 days or less if the student transfers from one school to another **without** a change of program.

**Exceptions to the rule:** VA will **not** pay for intervals between terms, regardless of length, if the student is:

- On active duty, or
- Training at a less-than-half time rate on the last day of the term preceding the interval;

*NOTE: This restriction applies even if a reduction in course load during the last month did not actually result in a reduction in benefits.*

**Also,** VA will **not** pay for intervals:

- That occur between school years at a school which are not organized on a term, quarter or semester basis.
- Between terms for which a student requests, **before award authorization**, that no benefits be paid.
- In which the student will exhaust his or her entitlement and it is to the student's advantage not to receive benefits for the interval to conserve entitlement. (VA will send a letter to explain to the student that benefits have not been authorized for the interval to conserve enough entitlement to allow re enrollment in a subsequent term.)
- Between terms when the student withdraws from all courses in the term preceding the interval or discontinues training before the scheduled start of an interval in a school not organized on a term, quarter or semester basis.

**Nonstandard Terms Other than Summer Terms.** Some terms, such as accelerated terms scheduled in the fall, winter, or spring, do not meet the definition of a standard "quarter" or "semester" and are not "summer terms" either. VA will **not** authorize payment for the interval between nonstandard terms unless they are **consecutive** nonstandard terms.

**Protection of Entitlement to Interval Payment.** You may discover VA previously paid an individual for an interval that occurred after November 1, 2000, and now under the new rules, the individual isn't entitled to the payment for the interval. In these situations VA will **not** create an overpayment if the award was authorized before the new instructions were received.