



# **Durbin urges Department of Defense and Veteran Affairs to protect veterans and service members at Ashford University**

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WASHINGTON—U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Jack Reed (D-RI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Tom Carper (D-DE), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) today urged the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to take steps to protect service members using Tuition Assistance (TA) benefits and veterans using GI Bill benefits at Ashford University in light of the company's impending loss of VA Post-9/11 GI Bill approval. On November 9th, the VA notified

Ashford that it is not in compliance with GI Bill eligibility requirements related to state approval and has 60 days to come into compliance or lose eligibility.



“We are pleased with the VA’s actions to enforce the law and regulations. But the fact remains that Ashford’s noncompliance threatens to interrupt the education of service members using TA benefits and some 9,000 veterans using GI Bill education benefits to

attend the institution,” the Senators wrote. “We believe additional steps must be taken to adequately protect veterans now that it is likely Ashford will lose GI Bill eligibility.”

In letters to DoD Secretary James Mattis and VA Secretary David Shulkin, the Senators urged the DoD and VA to immediately notify, through direct email and mail, all of the TA students and the more than 9,000 GI Bill students currently enrolled at Ashford of the impending disruption of benefits and provide these students with resources about their rights and high quality transfer options. They also urged the DoD and VA to prohibit new service members using TA benefits and veterans using GI Bill benefits from enrolling at Ashford until further notice.

Ashford is currently engaged in a legally dubious scheme to maintain its GI Bill eligibility, which brought in nearly \$38 million in 2016. In order to be eligible to receive GI Bill education benefits, an institution of higher education must be approved by the State Approving Agency (SAA) for the state in which its main campus is located. Last year, when Ashford closed its Iowa main campus, the Iowa SAA withdrew its approval of Ashford citing its lack of jurisdiction. Ashford challenged Iowa’s decision in federal court and lost earlier this summer.

Instead of seeking SAA approval in California, where Ashford’s parent company Bridgepoint is headquartered, Ashford sought and received approval from the Arizona SAA, which it asked the VA to recognize for purposes of GI Bill eligibility. In response to Ashford last week, VA rightfully found that approval by the Arizona SAA is “legally insufficient because the Arizona SAA lacks jurisdiction to approve Ashford” and that Ashford will lose GI Bill eligibility in 60 days if it fails to get approved by the California SAA.

Ashford is also currently facing investigations by attorneys general in New York, North Carolina, and California. In 2014, Ashford agreed to pay \$7.25 million in a settlement with the Iowa Attorney General for its misleading recruitment practices. Just last year, Ashford agreed to pay \$30 million in a settlement with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) for deceptive acts and practices including lying to students about their student loan payments.

In 2016, Ashford was the third largest recipient of TA benefits, enrolling 15,447 service members. According to DoD Instruction 1322.25, institutions of higher education must be approved for VA GI Bill funding in order to participate in DoD’s Voluntary Education Programs, including Tuition Assistance.

Full text of the letter to Secretary Mattis can be found [here](#). Full text of the letter to Secretary Shulkin can be found [here](#).