



# Duckworth urges VA to fully repay every veteran impacted by GI benefits backlog

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), a combat Veteran and former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), [wrote](#) to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie today to ensure VA fully repays every Veteran the benefits they are owed – with interest – under the post 9/11 “Forever GI Bill,” but have not received due to VA’s massive payments backlog. Duckworth urged VA to also assume any financial penalties Veterans incur because of VA’s failure to make on-time payments to many student Veterans, and she asked VA to coordinate with credit reporting agencies to offer Veterans long-term protection by ensuring no Veteran has their credit rating downgraded, which could lead to lasting financial harm as a result of this crisis.

“VA’s inability to implement these key provisions has caused significant hardship for thousands of Veteran students. As a result, many Veterans were unable to pay rent, tuition, buy books or put food on the table when the 2018 fall semester began,” Duckworth [wrote](#). “VA was still unprepared even though they were given more than \$4 billion a year for information technology improvements and had over a year to prepare for the changes required under the law. It is critical that the VA make Veterans whole for any missed or underpaid benefits to which they are legally entitled, regardless of the burden it may place on the VA.”

As a result of VA’s massive backlog of housing payments, VA officials have said that as many as 82,000 student Veterans have not received the full housing benefits this year that they have earned. Some Veterans have reportedly been evicted and become homeless as a result of VA’s failures to make these payments.

Duckworth also wrote to credit reporting agencies asking them to ensure that no Veteran who fell behind on their payments as a result of the backlog will receive credit

downgrades that could hurt their ability to make large purchases, start a business, open a credit card or secure a loan in the future.

“Those Veterans who fell behind on their housing payments or were evicted will receive adverse marks on credit reports that may result in a lifetime of hardship,” Duckworth [wrote](#) individually to the Chief Executive Officers of Experian, Equifax and TransUnion. “After the storm has passed, Veterans may continue to struggle to open future bank accounts, start businesses and secure loans as a result of VA’s failures. As the leader of a major credit reporting bureau, you possess the power and resources to make sure our Veterans’ financial futures are not harmed. While it is too late to prevent certain Veterans from experiencing eviction or dipping into savings as a result of VBA payment errors, you can still prevent lasting damage by working with VA and other relevant entities.”

A full copy of the letters are available online [here](#) and [here](#).