

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 19, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

Many Virginians have contacted our offices expressing concern that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been unable to provide the timely delivery of housing stipends to veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The VA has pointed to information technology system problems coupled with a change in housing processing requirements mandated by recent legislation as the reason for the delays. Tens of thousands of Virginia veterans and their families rely on the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

We are greatly concerned that the lack of prompt payments will cause some veterans to lose the opportunity to pursue their educational goals. Further, without the housing stipend payments, some veterans and their families are experiencing undue financial burdens. Due to the delays, some veterans have been unable to afford basic necessities, and in some cases, even displaced from their homes. The VA's inaction on this issue is causing far-reaching harm, not only to veterans, but to their families as well. Veterans are one of our nation's greatest assets; these payments were promised to them in order to ease the financial burden of higher education after military service, and they deserve to have those benefits delivered in a timely manner.

We are further troubled by this incident given your testimony to the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee during your nomination hearing. During this process, you asserted that a priority of yours would be to improve the VA's information technology systems. We are worried that this incident indicates that the VA has made little progress in this area since you became Secretary and may reduce the public's confidence that the VA is able to process requests and claims in a fair and timely manner. Additionally, in your prepared statement for the Committee, you wrote that given Congress' recent decision to increase the level of resources at the VA, there are "no more excuses" regarding the VA's performance. The VA needs to provide solutions, not excuses, if our country is to uphold the commitment made to those who have sacrificed so much to protect and defend the nation.

One of our priorities in the Senate has been to provide every transitioning servicemember the tools needed for success in the civilian world. We are proud that last year Congress expanded the Post-9/11 GI Bill program through the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act. If our veterans are to realize the promise of this legislation, the VA needs to implement the provisions of this bill efficiently and comprehensively. We urge you to quickly resolve these payment issues so that our veterans receive the benefits that they deserve.

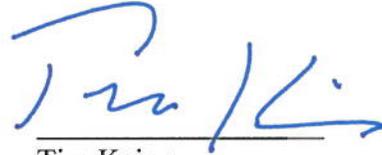
Thank you for your attention to this matter. We are ready to work with you to help provide veterans and their families affected by these payment delays the support needed to

continue their education. In order to provide clarification for Virginians who may be experiencing delays in payments, we expect a timely response in the next few weeks.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator