

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 22, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

Congratulations on your recent confirmation to serve as Secretary of Defense and for your continued service to our nation. We write to urge you to take the final steps necessary to restore a 2014 Department of Defense (DoD) policy that would enable the concurrent use of federal Tuition Assistance (TA) and Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR) benefits for Reserve Component (RC) servicemembers. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

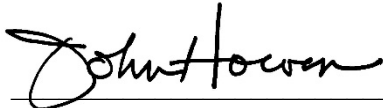
As you may be aware, in July of 2014, DoD officials interpreted DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1322.25 so that RC servicemembers receiving DoD-funded tuition assistance would no longer be allowed to concurrently receive MGIB-SR benefits for the same course. Conversely, their counterparts who qualify for the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty (MGIB-AD) are, by statute, able to use both benefits concurrently. We have previously argued that the DoD has the authority to authorize the concurrent use of TA and MGIB-SR benefits based on current guidance in DoDI 1322.17 which allows RC servicemembers to use both benefits concurrently as long as they are half-time or more enrolled. According to Title 10 USC, Section 16131, the MGIB-SR is an education allowance that can be used to pay tuition and fees, as well as the numerous other costs of college attendance including books, supplies, equipment, transportation, and housing.

That is why we were pleased to be made aware that in August of 2020, the Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD) indicated that it would work with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to restore the concurrent use of TA and MGIB-SR benefits for members of the National Guard and the Reserves by clarifying the use of both benefits with the VA. While this news was positive, we understand that further actions must still be taken by OSD in order to restore concurrent use of these benefits. In particular, we are told that OSD is required to send a signed policy advisory memo to the VA informing them of the change in policy.

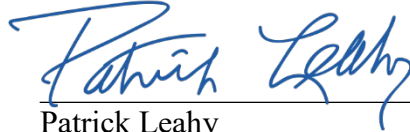
The brave men and women who serve in our Armed Forces choose to serve for a number of reasons and make countless sacrifices in the defense of our country. The benefits provided by TA and the MGIB-SR are valuable incentives that help the RCs meet their recruitment, retention, and readiness goals by providing financial means for servicemembers to obtain a college degree with reduced out of pocket expenses.

There is no question that the last year has especially demonstrated how important our Reserve Component is not just to our states, but to our country. We urge you to take the final necessary steps to reinstate the concurrent use of TA and MGIB-SR in accordance with DoDI 1322.17 so that we can uphold the promises made to our RC servicemembers and ensure the readiness of our all-volunteer force. Thank you for your prompt consideration of this matter, and for your commitment to our servicemembers and their families.

Sincerely,



John Hoeven
U.S. Senator



Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senator



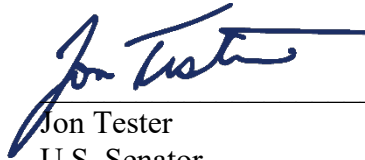
John Boozman
U.S. Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
U.S. Senator



Lindsey O. Graham
U.S. Senator



Jon Tester
U.S. Senator



Kevin Cramer
U.S. Senator



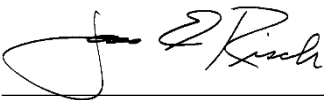
Margaret Wood Hassan
U.S. Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
U.S. Senator



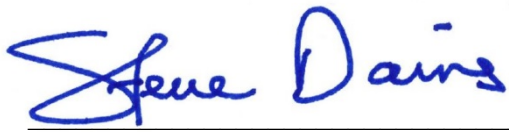
Bernard Sanders
U.S. Senator



James E. Risch
U.S. Senator



Mike Crapo
U.S. Senator



Steve Daines
U.S. Senator



M. Michael Rounds
U.S. Senator