



AABInternational



The Honorable Phil Roe, M.D.
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tim Walz
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 2, 2018

Dear Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz:

On behalf of Regional Airline Association (RAA), Cargo Airline Association (CAA), Airports Council International – North America (ACI-NA), American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE), National Air Carrier Association (NACA), International Air Transport Association (IATA), University Aviation Association (UAA), Aviation Accreditation Board International (AABI), Airlines for America (A4A), and Regional Air Cargo Carriers Association (RACCA), we are writing to express our shared concerns regarding H.R. 4149, which would make untimely changes to the use of GI benefits for veterans' investing in flight training. Specifically, H.R. 4149 would significantly curtail educational benefits for veterans who pursue flight training degree programs. In doing so, the legislation would unfortunately and effectively dissuade many, if not all, veterans from pursuing a commercial pilot career path.

We appreciate that H.R. 4149 offers improvements for veterans in certain areas such as the allowance for accelerated payment schedules and the provision allowing aspiring pilots to use benefits to obtain a private pilot license when incorporated into the requirements of a professional flight training program. However, we are deeply concerned about language that would limit funding for flight training degree programs at public colleges and universities.

The Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) FY18 budget request projects that this limitation on flight training degree programs would cost veterans \$228.8 million in benefits over five years or \$45.8 million annually. According to Stars and Stripes, in 2016 alone, there were approximately 1,700 veterans enrolled in flight training programs at a cost of about \$48.5 million. Even the VA's own analysis indicates that this change would dissuade virtually all veterans from using their educational benefits for a flight training degree.

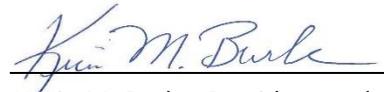
Not only does H.R. 4149 stand to deprive veterans of their promised benefits on educational financial assistance, the cap on flight training is particularly concerning in the face of an acute and growing nationwide pilot shortage, which has already caused commercial air service cuts across the country. Further, the U.S. military is also dealing with its own pilot shortage, with the Air Force reporting deficits of close to 2,000 pilots. We are producing fewer pilots at present than are needed to serve our nation's commercial, business, and military aviation sectors.

Veterans who undertake this training benefit are positioned for entry into an in-demand and highly compensated career path. According to Brown Aviation Lease, a pilot's return on investment (ROI) is higher than many other high-earning careers. In fact, for every \$1 invested in education, pilots earn \$33; this compares to \$19 for doctors and \$30 for lawyers. This high ROI is also complemented by a significant degree of career stability as the need for commercial pilots is and will be in high demand for the foreseeable future. According to Boeing, the North American aviation industry will need 117,000 commercial pilots between now and 2036. For all of these reasons, now is not the time to curtail these important and much needed benefits.

As written, H.R. 4149 would harm veterans and prevent them from gaining entry into this highly rewarding career. For that reason, we believe that H.R. 4149 should be revised to remove the cap on flight training at public institutions. We appreciate the Committee's work in this area and stand ready to work on proposals that offer veterans additional flexibility without unduly limiting their ability to pursue a flight training education.

Sincerely,


Faye Malarkey Black, President
Regional Airline Association


Kevin M. Burke, President and CEO
Airports Council International – North America


Todd Hauptli, President and CEO
American Association of Airport Executives


Stephen Alterman, President
Cargo Airline Association



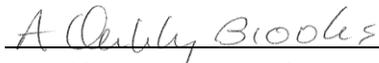
Sharon Pinkerton, Senior Vice President
Airlines for America



Dr. David Ison, President
University Aviation Association



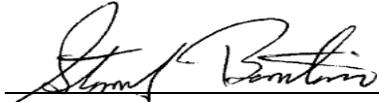
Douglas E. Lavin, Vice President,
Member and External Relations
International Air Transport Association



A. Oakley Brooks, President
National Air Carrier Association



Lynne McMullen, Chairperson
Aviation Accreditation Board International



Stan Bernstein, President
Regional Air Cargo Carrier Association