

September 17, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House of Representatives
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Minority Leader Jeffries:

On behalf of associations representing thousands of aviation businesses, state government agencies, and hundreds of thousands of pilots, we express our appreciation for the House's ongoing efforts to improve the delivery of veterans' educational benefits. However, we write to express our strong opposition to H.R. 7323, which includes provisions that would significantly cap veterans' flight training benefits under the Post-9/11 GI bill, disproportionately harming veterans seeking careers in aviation.

Aviation is a vital industry, supporting over 7% of the U.S. GDP and providing more than 11.5 million jobs. The aviation sector is in dire need of qualified pilots, and veterans are among the best candidates to fill this demand. Flight training programs are essential in producing the next generation of commercial pilots, helicopter operators, air ambulance crews, and other critical aviation roles. Limiting veterans' benefits through a cap would restrict their access to these crucial career opportunities at a time when the industry needs them most.

The bill, as currently written, would impose a lifetime cap of \$115,749 on flight training benefits starting in the 2025-2026 academic year. While this is an increase from the \$108,480 cap initially proposed, it still represents a substantial limitation on the funds veterans can access for flight training. The high cost of civilian flight training programs, due to their complexity and specialized nature, cannot be adequately covered under these restrictions. As a result, veterans would likely be forced to either abandon their flight training or take on significant personal debt to cover the shortfall.

It is especially concerning that this bill singles out veterans pursuing careers in aviation by imposing funding caps that do not apply to other degree programs. This creates an unfair and discriminatory situation, where veterans seeking to become pilots face unique financial hurdles not imposed on veterans in other fields. Veterans should have the freedom to pursue the career of their choice, including those in the aviation sector, without facing arbitrary financial limitations.

We remain committed to working with Congress to ensure that veterans can access the benefits they were promised, and that they can pursue careers in aviation without financial obstacles. We urge you to remove the cap on flight training benefits in H.R. 7323 and ensure veterans can fully utilize their GI Bill benefits to pursue careers that are both rewarding and necessary to the nation's future.

Sincerely,

Air Medical Operators Association
Airborne Public Safety Association
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association
Airlines for America
American Association of Airport Executives
Experimental Aircraft Association
General Aviation Manufacturers Association
National Air Carrier Association
National Air Transportation Association
National Association of State Aviation Officials
National Business Aviation Association
Regional Airline Association
Vertical Aviation International