

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2016

Mr. Danny Pummill
Acting Under Secretary for Benefits
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Mr. Pummill,

On behalf of our constituents in Oklahoma as well as millions of veterans nationwide who have honorably served our nation, we are writing in regard to an issue that has been brought to our attention regarding veterans' eligibility for benefits in attaining postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) at area career and technical centers. CTE comprises a major component of our nation's higher education system and plays an important role in preparing members of our military for economic success after they return home.

After the "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010" was approved, area CTE centers, which are public, non-profit, postsecondary institutions that award certificates, began working with veterans who were newly able to use their education benefits at non-degree-granting institutions. Area CTE centers are a critical part of the public postsecondary education delivery system in Oklahoma, so the changes made in 2010 to allow students to use their veterans' education benefits at these institutions were very beneficial.

However, a new issue related to education programs at these non-degree-granting institutions has arisen. As our area CTE centers have begun the process of requesting approval for the use of veterans' education benefits for their programs, they have discovered that programs that include an online or distance learning component are still not eligible.

On February 2, 2016, Oklahoma area CTE centers received notice that these programs would no longer be approved by the State Accrediting Agency because they were not compliant with federal law. Throughout our state, this has led to our veterans being denied access to over 200 programs that grant crucial workforce certificates. Why are these programs now being deemed ineligible after being supported for the six years since CTE centers were approved for funding by the "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010"?

We would like to know why these programs are ruled arbitrarily ineligible, despite the fact that the certificate programs including online education at these institutions are accredited. These programs are integral to the industry and workforce development needs of communities and states, as well as to the higher education systems in such states where non-degree-granting

degree-granting higher education institutions exist. Under the current rules, a student is able to use their veteran's benefits for certificate programs with online learning components at a community college or degree-granting proprietary institution, but the exact same program offered in the same way at an area CTE center is being deemed ineligible.

We believe it is important for our veterans to have access to opportunities to economically empower themselves at the institution of their choosing, and that eligibility for benefits should be judged based on the merits of individual programs. Online education has the potential to ease the path to postsecondary credentials for many more adult students, such as returning veterans, and institutions seeking to implement such innovative strategies as blended learning should be applauded, not penalized.

The value of postsecondary certificate programs provided at these institutions is not in question, and there is great damage inflicted on our veterans by deeming high-quality programs ineligible. Credential-granting programs offered at these institutions span across many industries, from health care to information technology, and boost graduates' earnings by an average of 20 percent, according to a report from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce.

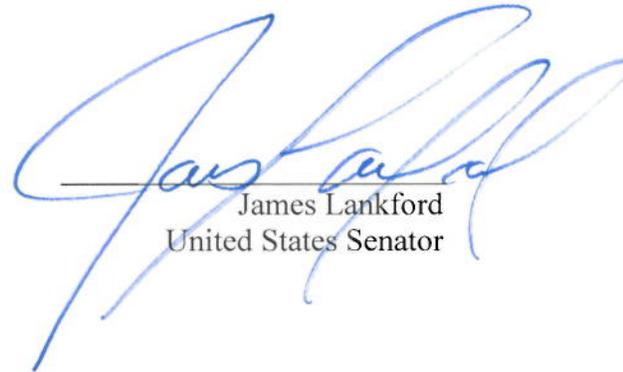
It is our hope that we can provide relief to the individuals affected by this problem, while still ensuring necessary integrity and program quality measures. We are sure you agree that, given the tremendous sacrifices of members of our military and their families, veterans should be provided a full range of career training options and the ability to pursue a quality postsecondary education at the institution of their choice.

We look forward to hearing from you and working with you to address this important issue on behalf of those who have served our nation.

Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



Markwayne Mullin
Member of Congress