



**Testimony of**

**Dr. Allen L. Sessoms**

**President**

**University of the District of Columbia**

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**Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3329, H.R. 3483, H.R. 3610,**

**H.R. 3670, H.R. 3524, H.R. 4048, H.R. 4051, H.R. 4052,**

**H.R. 4057, and H.R. 4072**

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**House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**

**The Honorable Marlin Stutzman, Chairman**

**The Honorable Bruce Braley, Ranking Member**

**March 8, 2012**

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Chairman Stutzman, Ranking Member Braley, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee.

I am Dr. Allen Sessoms, President of the University of the District of Columbia, the only public institution of higher education here in our Nation's Capital. I am testifying on behalf of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, commonly known as 'AASCU.' AASCU represents 420 institutions and university systems across 49 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands.

Thank you for holding this hearing and providing me the opportunity to present testimony in support of H.R. 3483, The Veterans Education Equity Act of 2011, introduced by the Honorable G.K. Butterfield of North Carolina. I ask that my testimony be entered into the record.

If enacted, H.R. 3483 would remedy a serious inequity that currently exists under the Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits program.

The current structure of the Post 9/11 GI Bill education benefits provides a tuition assistance benefit to a Veteran who attends one of our country's prestigious public colleges or universities that is equal to the in-State tuition rate charged by the institution. This benefit is worth, on average, about \$ 8,244 per year. On the contrary, if one of our Veterans chooses to attend an out-of-state private institution,

he or she will automatically qualify for up to \$17,500 per year. Simply put, a Veteran who chooses to attend a public institution is entitled to, on average, less than half of the benefit a Veteran who chooses to attend private institution.

In addition to the disparate treatment of our Veterans attending public versus private institutions, the current Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit structure also asks our Veterans to pick up the difference between in-State and out-of-State tuition. This can amount to over \$13,000 per year in some States, and averages \$4,282 across the country. Not only are we providing our Veterans with different tuition benefits depending on the type of institution they choose to attend, we are also asking them to pick up the tab if they choose to attend a public institution in a different State.

In a metropolitan area such as the National Capital Region, where students regularly travel across State lines to earn their degrees, this significantly limits the number of institutions our Veterans may realistically choose from. For example, Veterans attending the University of the District of Columbia, but living in Maryland or Virginia, are required under District of Columbia law to pay the non-resident tuition rate of \$13,380. This amounts to \$7,000 per year for a full-time baccalaureate student. The Yellow Ribbon program does provide a \$500 tuition

assistance benefit to our non-resident Veterans; however this is only a fraction of the non-resident tuition premium.

The current Post 9/11 GI Bill tuition structure also harms those who have recently relocated to a State and enroll in that State's public institution, but do not yet qualify for in-State tuition. Many states have enacted minimum residency requirements students must meet to be eligible for in-State tuition rates. For example, in the District of Columbia, to receive the in-State tuition rate, a Veteran must reside in the District for a full year to become eligible. This may cause a recently relocated Veteran to put off pursuing a degree until he or she is eligible for a lower tuition rate.

Passage of this bill is especially important at a time when unemployment for our veterans is extremely high. According to recent statistics from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's "Hiring Our Heroes" program, unemployment for veterans aged 18-24 is 30%. For those in the National Guard, it is 14%. These numbers are well above the national average. Other research has shown that individuals with more than a high school diploma are more likely to be employed. Passing H.R. 3483 will give our Veterans a greater opportunity to select the postsecondary program and institution best suited for them and by so doing, put them on the path to employment.

As a grateful Nation, we are committed to providing our Veterans with the maximum benefits they rightly deserve. Let's make sure we also are providing the flexibility our Veterans need to use them. On behalf of the 420 members of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, I urge Congress to pass the Veterans Education Equity Act of 2011 without delay.