
GI Bill Parity: Expand Eligibility for Post-9/11 Educational Assistance

ROA urges Congress to include all paid points days for National Guard and Reserve service members. Eligibility should include days for training, active military service, inactive training, and general duty. (Title 38 U.S.C. §3311(b))

Currently, National Guard and Reserve Component service members can accrue qualifying days toward receiving Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits if they have served at least 90 days on active duty or if they have served a minimum of 30 days continuous days and are discharged with a service-connected disability, or are awarded the Purple Heart for service after September 10, 2001.

These conditions put reserve component members at a distinct disadvantage for earning their educational benefits. A National Guard and Reserve service member wears the uniform and performs their duty responsibilities a minimum of 39 days, (24 Inactive Training Days (IDT), 15 Annual Tour (AT)) and none of these duty days count toward GI Bill eligibility.

Total Force Integration has provided seamless operations between military components and has been effective in mission accomplishment. Demands on our military require the reserve component to conduct training and operations shoulder-to-shoulder with active duty counterparts. For the same training day, active duty members will receive credit toward their GI Bill whereas the reservists standing next to them will not.

GI Bill eligibility reform is necessary to close the gap between how a reservist can earn their benefit commensurate with the duties they perform. **H.R. 1836, the Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2021** would expand qualifying days for National Guard and Reserve members by including IDT, AT, and general duty in addition to active military service. A minimum participating National Guard or reserve member would then earn those 39 days toward GI Bill eligibility.

If passed, the expansion of eligibility days would still not compare to the rate an active duty member would earn GI Bill days. An active duty service member earns GI Bill days every day, however, it would take a minimum participating reservist 2.3 years to reach their first 90 days of qualifying service, which would only earn them 90 days of benefits. At that rate, it would require 9.2 years for that service member to earn one full year of GI Bill benefits. This would enhance the reserve component benefit without detracting from what active duty offers.

Included with H.R. 1836 is a provision for providing information to new veterans of the reserve component regarding benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Transition Assistance Program (TAP) attendance is not mandated at the end of a reservist's career, like it is for active duty when this information would be most useful. Reserve Component service-members are leaving military service without knowledge on what VA benefits they've earned and how to access them as they are earned and administered differently.

Complicating matters further, National Guard and Reserve service members are not issued a DD Form 214 at the end of their military service, so they do not have adequate documentation to confer their service record or prove their eligibility to federal, state, local and private agencies. Reforming the document to not only be issued at the end of career, but to include a data field that explicitly shows GI Bill eligibility information would reduce the burden currently required by the service member to prove eligibility.