

**California Community College Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley
Written Comments**

**Committee on Education and Labor Subcommittee on Higher Education and
Workforce Investment & Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on
Economic Opportunity**

**Joint Field Hearing
"Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Ensuring the Success of our Student
Veterans"**

Wednesday, April 24, 2019

10:30 a.m.

Grossmont College Griffin Gate
Building 60, 1st Floor

Introduction

I am Eloy Ortiz Oakley. I am here today as a veteran, a product of public higher education, and as Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. My story is very similar to the nearly 2.2 million students we serve in the California Community Colleges. Coming out of high school, I did not have a clear understanding on how to navigate higher education nor did I have the resources in my family or community to provide me clear direction. While I had the opportunity to attend several quality colleges, I chose not due to the fear that I could not afford to attend. Instead, I proudly joined the U.S. Army on the heels of the Granada invasion. President Reagan was my Commander-in-Chief and I served in Americas Honor Guard, the 82nd Airborne Division for most of my enlistment. By the time I found my way to college, I was a father and the primary provider for my family. I worked full time, attended school part-time, and eventually made it through Golden West College and earned an MBA at the University of California, Irvine. Through hard work, perseverance, the support of committed faculty and staff and a lot of luck, I am here today. My goal as Chancellor of the California Community Colleges is to remove "luck" from the equation for our students, so that all students have the opportunity to benefit from a high-quality, affordable college education.

Veteran Services at California Community Colleges

With an estimated 1.6 million veterans, California has the largest veteran population in the nation. **Each year** approximately 80,000 veterans and active duty service members look to the California Community Colleges as the most accessible and affordable educational option available.

For the men and women who have defended our freedoms, the California Community Colleges provide more than academic and career training – we also assist with the often-difficult transition to life after military service, particularly after combat service. We provide our veterans with access to academic counseling, disability

accommodations, veteran benefits information, as well as referrals to campus, local, state, and federal resources and services. The California Legislature has supported our efforts to expand services to veterans. In the last two years, the California Legislature has provided nearly \$20 million to our system to support the creation and expansion of Veteran Resource Centers.

Here at Grossmont College, these funds have supported a Veterans Resource Center that is integrated with other offices, such as the Accessibility Resource Center, Gizmos Kitchen Food Pantry, and the Veteran Affairs Office. This ensures easy access, effective collaboration, and better service delivery for our student veterans.

Effect of Predatory For-Profit Colleges on Veteran Students

California Community Colleges is the largest and most diverse system of higher education in the nation. We are part of California's postsecondary education structure -- which includes public **and private** university partners -- to provide access to all students in our state. The foundation of this interconnectedness is that, when one sector of higher education is consistently failing protect our students and failing to fulfill its mission, it affects our entire ecosystem of providing meaningful access and high-quality education outcomes for our students.

In recent years, California has been particularly hard hit by the fraudulent practices and abrupt closures of a number of for-profit education providers. The education benefits provided by the Post-9/11 GI Bill, together with the loophole in the federal 90-10 rule, have provided great financial incentive to for-profit colleges to recruit veterans. Our veteran students have been particularly vulnerable in these circumstances.

It has been, and will continue to be, within the mission of the California Community Colleges to serve our students in California affected by these closures. When Corinthian Colleges Inc. closed, my Office of the Chancellor performed direct outreach and worked with our colleges to serve the approximately 16,000 former Corinthian students living in California. Approximately 1,200 of those former Corinthian students were veterans using their GI Bill benefits. We offered trainings and resources, participated in webinars and outreach events, and provided information relating to transfer of credit, federal student loan forgiveness, and California's Student Tuition Recovery Fund. We found that many of these students, unfortunately, had received poor-quality education that could not easily transfer; many faced the expiration of financial aid benefits; and many had massive debt loads.

The California Community Colleges is founded on the belief that all students should be provided with the opportunity to reach their full potential. We provide students a high-quality, low-cost pathway to a meaningful college degree and credential. As indicated previously, we are committed to working as a part of a larger higher education system that includes public and private colleges and universities. However, the abusive and fraudulent practices of bad actors in the for-profit sector continue to harm our ability to fulfill our core mission.

Our system certainly will continue to find ways to help students pick up the pieces of their education goals in the aftermath of college closures. At the same time, we hope Congress will take swift action to support students by providing meaningful oversight, accountability, and student protections. Actions that commensurate with the sacrifices that our veterans have made.

From our perspective, a meaningful accountability structure must seek to ensure (1) that colleges are held responsible for measurable outcomes, (2) that career-training programs result in wage gains that allow students to repay any loan debt incurred, and (3) that students have access to reliable, comparable, and consumer-friendly information about cost and performance.

Congress should ensure that all colleges that participate in the Federal Student Aid program are using public funds appropriately and that a robust, transparent, accountability, and oversight structure protects against the abuses of bad actors. To that end, we also are in strong support of the provisions contained in the PROTECT Students Act of 2019, as proposed by Senator Hassan and Senator Durbin.

Closing Comments

In closing, the 115 colleges in the California Community College system are working hard to support all of our students and provide wraparound services to our veteran students. The ongoing abuses occurring in the for-profit higher education sector unequivocally harm our ability to serve California students. Please count on the California Community Colleges as a partner in your effort to correct these abuses and better serve all of our students, veteran and non-veteran alike.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.