



## Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

Gerard M. Farrell  
Captain U.S. Navy (Ret)  
Executive Director

27 October 2009

The Honorable Timothy J. Walz  
Longworth House Office Building, Room 1722  
Washington, DC 20515

SAMPLE

Dear Mr. Walz:

Because you are a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am writing to encourage you to cosponsor HR 3657. It was introduced last month by Congressman Ciro Rodriguez, one of your committee colleagues. His bill would correct an oversight in the Post-9/11 GI Bill that was approved by Congress in 2008.

HR 3657 would make the retention incentive known as transferability accessible to the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Corps. These are the smallest of our Nation's seven uniformed services; the USPHS Commissioned Corps has an active-duty force of 6,800 and the NOAA Corps has an active-duty force of only 300. Members of both services have participated in all GI Bill programs since World War II.

The Veterans Administration was able to fix much of the problem in the course of developing implementing regulations. Citing law (Title 42, U.S. Code) and precedent, the agency ruled on March 31 that USPHS and NOAA officers are entitled to all Post-9/11 GI Bill entitlements *except* transferability. As you know, this is the provision that would permit service members to transfer their unused educational benefits to their children.

Because of the narrow wording of the transferability provision, expanding it to include USPHS and NOAA will require a change in the statutory language. That is why HR 3657 is important not only to us, but to the many other organizations advocating on behalf of our Nation's veterans. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gerard M. Farrell  
Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)  
Executive Director

Enclosure: Letter from The Military Coalition

November 30, 2009

SAMPLE

Senator Christopher J. Dodd  
448 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Transferability of Post-9/11 GI Bill Benefits for Public Health Service (PHS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Officers.

Dear Senator Dodd:

I am on Active Duty in the US Public Health Service, and am stationed in Maryland. I vote in Connecticut, which is my home of record. I am also a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force and Army. I am writing to ask your support to extend GI Bill transferability to PHS and NOAA officers. Personally, I have used the Montgomery G.I. Bill to assist me in obtaining my PhD in Nursing from The Catholic University of America. I have no spouse or children and would not benefit from transferability. I am writing on behalf of my brothers and sisters in the PHS, many of whom have also served in the Military. I am writing because Transferability is the Right Thing To Do.

Rep. Ciro Rodriguez of the House Veteran's Affairs Committee has introduced H.R. 3657, to provide Public Health Service (PHS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) commissioned officers with transferability of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. I ask for your support for the creation of a companion bill in the Senate to extend GI Bill transferability to PHS and NOAA officers. Though I am aware that you are not on the Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee, I ask that you encourage your colleagues on the VA Committee to generate similar legislation. If and when such legislation is created, I hope that you would co-sponsor such a bill and build a coalition towards its passage.

Currently, I am assigned as a nurse and Grants Administrator to the National Institutes of Health. I have several duties at NIH and in addition, as a PHS officer, I have deployed to over 20 public health emergencies to include the 2001 Terrorist Attacks at the World Trade Center and the Anthrax Attack in Washington, DC.

Since the Corps was established in 1889, USPHS officers have served in every major armed conflict. The PHS currently has officers serving alongside our Military in Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, NOAA Corps officers commonly serve in austere and hazardous conditions.

Under their interpretation of the law, the VA ruled on March 31, 2009, that PHS and NOAA officers are entitled to all Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits but one – the benefit known as “transferability,” which permits active duty officers to transfer their unused educational benefits to their children. PHS officers are all degreed professionals (e.g. doctors, dentists, engineers), who often do not use GI Bill benefits. As such, transferability benefits would serve as a recruitment and

retention tool. The PHS has significant needs, especially for clinical providers in

underserved populations. Transferability of GI Bill benefits would be a great tool to meet its workforce requirements.

PHS and NOAA have always been included in previous Montgomery GI Bill benefits, including transferability. I believe the omission of PHS and NOAA officers from the provision of transferability was an oversight, the correction of which will be crucial for recruitment and retention in our respective Corps'.

H.R. 3657 would modify the statutory language to extend transferability to USPHS and NOAA officers. I am requesting your support for the creation and passage of a companion bill in the Senate to provide transferability of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to PHS and NOAA officers.

Sincerely,

Angela M. Martinelli, Ph.D, R.N.  
Captain, USPHS