

# HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

REPUBLICANS | RANKING MEMBER MIKE BOST

## The VITAL Assessment Act

### Background:

Hundreds of thousands of veterans go to school every year using the GI Bill and other earned education benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). According to VA, student veterans often have difficulty adjusting from military culture to campus culture and may struggle to relate to their non-veteran peers at school because they have different ages, experiences, and expectations. What's more, 62% of student veterans are first generation college students.

In 2011, VA launched the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program to provide mental health services to student veterans on college campuses. Since then, VITAL has grown to support student veterans at 183 locations. VITAL is locally managed, staffed, and evaluated by VA medical centers working with area schools. While that allows for independence and flexibility, it does not allow for critical information about VITAL to be tracked by VA central office so that best practices can be identified and the mental health needs of student veterans can be prioritized.

The *VITAL Assessment Act* would require VA to report to Congress about VITAL's management, operations, and effectiveness in supporting student veterans' mental health and educational goals, connecting student veterans with needed care and services, and preventing student veteran suicide. VA would be required to use the information in the report to establish and disseminate best practices, goals, and performance measures for VITAL and conduct outreach to ensure student veterans and other stakeholders are aware of VITAL. The bill would also require VA to consider including student veteran suicide statistics in VA's annual suicide data reports.

### The Message:

- Student veterans earned their education benefits in service to our country.
- Student veterans have unique needs and experiences that can make college particularly stressful.
- The *VITAL Assessment Act* is a commonsense bill to support student veterans' mental health and help them achieve their goals and dreams.