

Veteran Faces VA Red Tape and Thousands in Student Loans after Paperwork Error

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After being recently medically separated from the military, Mark Dressler, a 19-year Air Force veteran, planned to use his Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to continue his education. After participating in the Department of Veteran Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program, he was accepted at Diesel Driving Academy in Shreveport, La. for a commercial driver's licensing, or CDL, program.

Working toward the goal of being an over-the-road truck driver, Mark was a month into his training when the school's financial aid department delivered a devastating message. "I was informed by the school financial department ... the GI Bill would not cover my tuition and I had to take out loans for over \$8,000 and pay \$1,500 [in housing costs] out-of-pocket or leave the school," said Mark.

Out of options and having no other way to finish school, Mark was forced to pay his first month's housing bill using a credit card and take out thousands of dollars in student loans. Refusing to put another month's rent on a credit card, he contacted the VFW's 1 Student Veteran program for help after seeing an ad for the VFW's program on Facebook.

In less than 24 hours, George Burke, Special Assistant for Veterans Benefit Policy, responded to Mark's email. Using his VA expertise and resources, George discovered Mark's paperwork request to transfer from the Vocational Rehabilitation program and enroll using his Post 9/11 GI Bill education benefits had never been processed. In less than two weeks, George was able to cut through the red tape and work with a VA regional processing office representative to correct the paperwork issue and process Mark's enrollment for his CDL class. Not only did this eliminate the need for over \$8,000 in student loans, but it also processed Mark's housing and book allowances and allowed his school to refund his out-of-pocket costs.

"I would like to highly express my gratitude for Mr. Burke and this program," said Mark. "He worked on my case and was able to do what no one else could."

The 1 Student Veteran program leverages the VFW's decades of expertise in navigating the VA benefits system, offering direct assistance to student veterans like Mark who are experiencing problems accessing their VA education benefits or who have questions about other veterans' programs. Veterans who send a message to 1 Student Veteran will receive a reply from a VFW staff member who specializes in student veteran issues within one

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