

Automation of Post-9/11 GI Bill Benefits and VA-ONCE Remarks

On September 24, 2012, VA began automating certifications submitted electronically by institutions of higher learning (IHL) for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The goal of the ongoing automation effort is to minimize the amount of time between when a school certifying official (SCO) submits enrollment information and the time of receipt of benefits by a Veteran, including funds paid to the school on his or her behalf. As of November 1, 2012, we are automating approximately 29% of the IHL certifications received electronically through the VA-Online Certification of Enrollment (VA-ONCE) system. We want to increase the percentage of claims automation, but we need the assistance of SCOs.

The single largest reason for automation failure is the entry of free-text (non-standard) remarks. Because the "Other Remarks" field is a free-entry field, our claims processing system can't determine what has been entered or what effect the information has on the current benefit award. There are a number of reasons when free-text remarks should be used, such as

- indicating that practical training can be measured in clock and credit hours and providing the alternate measurement,
- indicating that a student is incarcerated for a felony conviction and providing the cost for books, supplies, and equipment, or
- reporting the number of hours for which a student didn't receive credit when completing a term with non-punitive grades.

Scenarios requiring the entry of free-text remarks are detailed in the School Certifying Official Handbook.

However, claims processors have noticed a number of free-text remarks that provide information that is not necessary to process the claim correctly. These free-text remarks prevent claims from being automated. Examples include

- Will send tuition and fees when term starts,
- Amended to reflect Yellow Ribbon contribution, and
- Non-attendance not reported to registrar until September 27.

Our claims processing system can determine what has changed by comparing the information on the new document to the original submission. As the reasons for the type changes noted above don't provide additional information that will change payment calculations, it is not necessary to include that information on the enrollment certification.

Please use remarks sparingly and use VBA standard remarks whenever applicable. Only use free-text remarks when the additional information impacts payment calculations and cannot be provided using the standard fields and remarks in VA-Once. If you're unsure if you need to include remarks on a VA-ONCE certification, please call the SCO Hotline or contact your [Education Liaison Representative](#) for assistance.