

The following article appeared in the *Tampa Bay Times* on June 22, 2012:

It was one of those "read the fine print" moments.

A Department of Veterans Affairs job-training program for unemployed veterans scheduled to launch on July 1, allowing veterans to get up to a year of training at community colleges, would have excluded schools that offered even a single bachelor's degree.

That would leave 23 of Florida's 28 community colleges ineligible to participate, including St. Petersburg College, according to the chancellor of the Florida College System.

But after a complaint by Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor, vice chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, the VA this week changed the rules of the program. Now it will allow community colleges offering a limited number of bachelor's degrees to take part in the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program, or VRAP.

Now all 28 Florida community colleges are eligible, according to Bilirakis' office.

Veterans ages 35 to 60 are eligible for VRAP training if they are otherwise ineligible for any other VA educational or training benefits and have not participated in any other government job-training program for half a year.

Earlier in the week, Bilirakis told the VA at a hearing on claims backlogs that he was concerned that the VA was excluding otherwise worthy community colleges. He asked the agency to reconsider.

"Using VA's narrow definition of community college, if a school awarded one bachelor's degree among hundreds or even thousands of associate's degrees, that school would not" be eligible to

train veterans, Bilirakis said at the committee meeting. "It is like saying that a bank that offers coffee to its patrons is no longer a bank and is now a Starbucks."

It took all of 18 hours for the VA to respond with a fix, according to Bilirakis' office.

*By William R. Levesque, Times Staff Writer*

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/military/veterans/va-fixes-flaw-in-training-program-after-rep-bilirakis-complaint/1236618>