



Pending Legislation

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Statement of
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Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

For the Record

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health

With Respect To

Pending Legislation

Washington, D.C.

Chairwoman Miller-Meeks, Ranking Member Brownley, and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

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(VFW) and its Auxiliary, thank you for the opportunity to provide our remarks on this pending legislation.

H.R. 785, Representing our Seniors at VA Act of 2025

The VFW supports this legislation to include a representative from the National Association of State Veterans Homes on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Geriatrics and Gerontology Advisory Committee. This inclusion would give state-run veterans homes a voice in federal VA policymaking on elder care, and facilitate collaboration between VA and State Veterans Homes (SVHs) as the veteran population continues to age.

SVHs originated in the pre-Civil War era and were initially established to care for injured and aging soldiers. These homes are operated by state governments and provide nursing, assisted living, or domiciliary care specifically for veterans. They offer long-term care services tailored to meet their unique needs.

Living in SVHs offers several benefits, including subsidized care, VA per diem grants that help reduce out-of-pocket expenses, and a supportive environment where veterans can connect with one another and build camaraderie. VA provides general oversight for all 153 SVHs, which care for approximately 14,500 veterans.

H.R. 2068, Veterans Patient Advocacy Act

The VFW supports this legislation to provide veterans living in highly rural areas with better access to patient advocate services. For the past eleven years, the VFW has partnered with Student Veterans of America (SVA) to select student veterans from across the country to research and advocate for improvements on issues that matter to veterans. Past VFW-SVA Fellow and Grand Valley State University graduate Cameron Zbikowski focused his semester-long research proposal on enhancing the patient advocate program at VA. He proposed improvements to ensure that each facility had an adequate number of patient advocates. In that spirit, the VFW continues to support this legislation.

H.R. 2605, Service Dogs Assisting Veterans (SAVES) Act

The VFW strongly supports this legislation to create a five-year pilot program in which VA would provide up to \$2 million in grants to nonprofit organizations to provide service dogs to eligible veterans. It would also provide commercially available veterinary insurance for them. Service dogs assist with various physical, auditory, and trauma-related disabilities. They help empower veterans to regain their independence, pride, and hope. While they are typically provided free of charge, the medical care involved can be costly. This legislation would enable more veterans to receive support animals with less of a financial burden.

The VFW thanks Representative Luttrell for introducing this legislation and for inviting VFW Post 4709 Commander Marcy Phillips from his Post in Conroe, Texas, to speak at the congressman's press conference for this legislation. The VFW was honored to have her talk about her service dog and how it has had a positive impact on her life.

H.R. 3400, Territorial Response and Access to Veterans' Essential Lifecare (TRAVEL) Act of 2025

The VFW supports this legislation to authorize VA physicians to temporarily serve as traveling physicians for up to one year in American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and other U.S. territories. It would improve support for veterans living in these areas or medically underserved regions by offering providers incentives like relocation or retention bonuses. This would allow VA to address gaps in health care in U.S. territories and provide a continuity of care through coordinated integration with local providers.

H.R. 3643, VA Data Transparency and Trust Act

The VFW supports the intent of this legislation, but we have questions about the scope of the information to be collected. This proposal would establish certain VA annual reports to

Congress from the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Health Administration. The reports would span five years, focusing on areas such as hospital care, medical services, nursing home care, and the management of these services. It includes a set of metrics designed to provide insights into veterans' demographic profiles, health conditions, service utilization, and benefits usage over time. While the VFW has advocated for improved data reporting by VA, we also want the intent of these reports to be made clear. The VFW also cautions against collecting income and other financial information of veterans that could be used to reduce benefits or prevent veterans from accessing their earned benefits.

Discussion Draft: To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study to determine whether RNA sequencing can be used to effectively diagnose PTSD in veterans

As a resolutions-based organization, the VFW does not have a position on this proposal at this time, however, we do have some concerns. This legislation would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on whether ribonucleic acid (RNA) sequencing can effectively diagnose post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in veterans. Although this idea is innovative, focusing solely on biological markers may oversimplify the complexity of the disorder. Trauma, environment, genetics, and psychology are all factors in PTSD. While a biomarker-based diagnostic tool could aid in the early detection of PTSD, it also raises several scientific, practical, and ethical concerns.

Discussion Draft: Health Professionals Scholarship Program Improvement Act of 2025

The VFW supports this legislation to improve the hiring of participants in the VA Health Professional Scholarship Program that provides scholarships to students pursuing health care degrees in exchange for service at VA facilities. It enables VA to provide incentives to qualified health care professionals to work at VA medical centers, particularly in areas where recruitment and retention are difficult.

This legislation would create a more efficient process of placing scholarship recipients into

clinical roles, which is particularly important given VA's critical medical staff shortages. It would do this by requiring VA to provide employment contracts within 90 days of students completing their coursework. It would also assign providers to VA facilities with the highest need, and offer competitive salaries and benefits aligned with VA standards.

H.R. 3726, Fisher House Availability Act of 2025

The VFW supports this legislation to allow veterans, service members, and their families to stay at temporary lodging facilities, such as Fisher Houses, when having to travel significant distances for medical care. For more than 30 years, Fisher Houses have been available free of charge. The Fisher House Foundation provided 57 homes to VA and 42 to the Department of Defense. A VA policy change in 2023 restricted these homes to only those receiving VA-directed care, greatly restricting service members with TRICARE from using this option. In 2024, Fisher Houses were operating at only 53 percent capacity, mainly housing the families of hospitalized veterans. This proposal would codify the previous practice of allowing service members who receive non-VA care and their families to stay at temporary lodging facilities on a space-available basis. The priority access would continue to be for veterans and their families. The VFW sees this as a reasonable expansion for TRICARE beneficiaries and their families. Broadening eligibility would help alleviate financial and logistical burdens when a loved one needs to be hospitalized or receive medical care far from home.

H.R. 1404, CHAMPVA Children's Care Protection Act of 2025

The VFW supports this legislation that extends the age limit for children eligible for medical coverage under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA). This legislation aims to enhance health care access for young adult children of veterans, ensuring they receive continuous care during a critical phase of life and minimizing coverage gaps for military families. This initiative is a key legislative priority for the VFW, and it aligns with other federal health care programs such as the Affordable Care Act that allows dependent coverage until age 26.

H.R. 2148, Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement

Act

The VFW supports this legislation to expand medical coverage, counseling, and employment services to individuals who have participated in VA's caregiver programs. These dedicated individuals spend a significant amount of time providing in-home care. When someone leaves the program, typically because the veteran loved one has passed away, the caregiver often faces challenges when attempting to reenter the workforce. Proper training, counseling, and support for reintegration are essential for those who have left their careers to become full-time caregivers.

This proposal would provide employment assistance to former caregivers through reimbursement of certification fees, access to VA training modules, and support through Military OneSource and the Veterans' Employment and Training Service. It would also expand available retirement planning and workforce transition assistance for these individuals; extend CHAMPVA medical coverage to former caregivers for 180 days after their designation ends as long as they were not dismissed for fraud, abuse, or mistreatment; and provide bereavement counseling following the death of the veteran. The VFW sees all of these initiatives as beneficial to the dedicated caregivers who provide long-term care for veterans who need it.

Discussion Draft: VA Mental Health Outreach and Engagement Act

The VFW appreciates the intent of this legislation, but we have certain recommendations for improvement. Currently, VA is required to offer a mental health consultation to veterans within 30 days after submitting a claim for disability compensation for mental health conditions. Offering veterans mental health consultations every year may be a deterrent that creates concerns that their benefits could be reduced, or cause retraumatization when asked to discuss their mental health needs.

The VFW recommends instead that VA conduct regular outreach to veterans who have filed VA claims (regardless of the outcome of these claims) and who do not utilize VA health care services, so they can receive information about services they may need now or in the future. Effective outreach to those within the VA health care system and to those who have not yet

enrolled would encourage veterans to consider these services and utilize them when needed.

Chairwoman Miller-Meeks, Ranking Member Brownley, this concludes my statement. Again, thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments on these issues.

Information Required by Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the VFW has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2025, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.

The VFW has not received payments or contracts from any foreign governments in the current year or preceding two calendar years.