

**STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ON  
“EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPACT OF FREE  
ASSOCIATION AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2024”**

**SEPTEMBER 10, 2024**

Good morning, Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss VA's efforts in implementing the Compact of Free Association (COFA) Amendments Act of 2024.

**Overview**

On March 9, 2024, President Biden signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-42). Division G, Title II of this Act is the COFA Amendments Act of 2024, which allows VA to expand access to health care for Veterans living in the Freely Associated States (FAS). The FAS consists of three sovereign nations in the Pacific: the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. At the end of fiscal year (FY) 2023, VHA estimated that 132 Veterans in the FAS were enrolled in VA health care and approximately 1,100 Veterans lived in the FAS.

Based on amendments made by this law, VA can furnish hospital care and medical services to Veterans in the FAS. As a condition of furnishing care and services, VA must enter into agreements with the FAS governments that define the terms and conditions of VA's delivery of care and services. These agreements also must, to the extent practicable, incorporate the applicable laws of the FAS. VA also can furnish beneficiary travel for Veterans and other persons traveling in, to, or from the FAS for receipt of care or services legally authorized to be provided by VA under these amendments.

**Implementation of COFA Amendments Act**

Since March, VA has been urgently working across the Government—including the White House and Departments of State, Interior, and Defense—to develop a comprehensive strategy and approach to assess health care delivery options in the area and develop the best path forward.

As a result of this work, VA is now ready to begin direct coordination with the FAS governments. During the next several months, we will be regularly meeting with the FAS governments to conduct a comprehensive environmental scan to review the current state of hospital care and medical services within the FAS. This coordination period—which precedes official negotiations—will provide us with critical information about the local Veteran population and needs for care in the region. We have sent letters to each of the FAS governments to begin this important collaboration, which we expect to last through the end of this calendar year.

During this time, VA will coordinate with Department of Defense leaders to solicit their input on delivering care in the FAS. We will also work with the Departments of State and Interior to draft and ultimately finalize the Action Memorandum (C-175), which is required before VA can officially begin negotiations on international agreements. Once those steps are complete, likely between January and March 2025, VA will begin formal negotiations on the final agreements with each of the FAS governments. All of this work will be done with the ultimate goal of ensuring that the Veterans in the FAS receive the care they have earned and deserve.

## **Conclusion**

VA is fully committed to ensuring that U.S. Veterans in the FAS have access to hospital care, medical services, and beneficiary travel benefits. While we finalize next steps toward implementation, eligible Veterans in the FAS can enroll for VA health care at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/> and continue receiving VA health care at VA medical facilities in the U.S. (including Guam) or in the FAS through the Foreign Medical Program (if eligible). Eligible Veterans can also access other VA services, including disability benefits, educational assistance, and pension services.

If Veterans have any questions about VA health care and benefits, they can visit <https://www.va.gov/> or call MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411) 24/7. Veterans living outside the U.S. can dial their country's exit code +001-800-698-2411.

Chairwoman Hageman, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your continued support of our mission. I am happy to respond to any questions you or the Committee may have.