



September 20, 2022

The Hon. Mark Takano
Chair
Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

The Hon. Mike Bost
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chair Takano and Ranking Member Bost,

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers (NACVSO), we write to thank you for holding a markup to consider the *Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act* (H.R. 4601). The 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs and workforce of over 2,400 County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) our organizations respectively represent support this legislation, which would meaningfully increase the ability of state, county, municipal and tribal veteran service officers to support veterans as they navigate the cumbersome bureaucracy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits process.

At the local level, CVSOs help veterans access a range of service-connected federal benefits, including VA health care, housing and transition assistance programs. CVSOs are often the first point of contact in the community for veteran's services. Across the country, CVSOs in 36 states and three Native American tribes CVSOs are responsible for helping veterans obtain more than \$50 billion annually in federal health, disability, pension and compensation benefits. Though CVSOs' primary focus is helping veterans navigate the federal benefits system, these offices are currently funded almost entirely by counties, which creates challenges for areas with high demand or counties that serve veterans in rural areas.

The CVSO act will provide critical federal resources to help us meet our growing caseloads by awarding competitive grants worth \$250 million over five years for states to create, expand, or support CVSOs or similar government entities, such as state, municipal and tribal VSOs. This is especially important following the recent bipartisan enactment of the *Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act*, which creates 23 new presumptive service conditions for toxic-exposed veterans and expands VA healthcare eligibility for millions of post-9/11 veterans. Similarly, the enactment of the VA MISSION Act and Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act and regulatory changes to add Agent Orange presumptive conditions have expanded opportunities for veterans to file health and disability claims with VA. CVSOs and our counterparts at other levels of government are on the front lines assisting veterans in navigating the benefits which they are newly eligible, but the absence of new federal resources to implement these changes mean they function as an unfunded mandate for local governments in particular. The CVSO Act is instrumental in enabling CVSOs and other state and local

government VSOs to implement the PACT Act and other sweeping changes to VA health and disability benefits without delay.

Thank you for your ongoing, bipartisan commitment to our nation's veterans and for acknowledging the important role that CVSOs play in providing them with the federal benefits they earned through their service. We urge you to pass this legislation out of Committee and look forward to working with you to ensure this legislation passes during the 117th Congressional session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Chase". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "M".

Matthew Chase,
Executive Director, NACo

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nichole Coleman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small star above the letter "i" in "Nichole".

Nichole Coleman
President, NACVSO