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September 21, 2022

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Bost
Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE) which represents approximately 700,000 federal and District of Columbia government employees in 70 agencies, including 283,000 employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), I write to express our positions on several bills being considered by the Committee today.

H.R. 8888, the "Food Security for All Veterans Act."

Representative Peltola's (D-AK) bill, the "Food Security for All Veterans Act," is designed to comprehensively address food insecurity for the veteran population by working in collaboration with other federal departments, tribal governments, and state governments.

AFGE takes this opportunity to strongly support a provision in Section 2 of the bill that requires the VA to "develop and provide training, including training that may count towards continuing education or licensure requirements, for social workers, dietitians, chaplains, and other clinicians on how to assist veterans with enrollment Federal nutrition assistance programs..." AFGE is proud to represent the clinicians who will benefit from this training and appreciates Rep. Peltola and the committee designing this legislation to help the VA workforce best serve veterans. We encourage the committee to continue to follow the example set by this bill and Chairwoman Brownley's H.R. 3693, the "VA CPE Modernization Act" to prioritize continuing professional education credit for VA employees that will directly improve the care given to veterans.

H.R. 2800, the "Working to Integrate Networks Guaranteeing Member Access Now Act" or the "WINGMAN Act"

Congressman Perry's (R-PA) bill, the "WINGMAN Act" would require the VA to enable congressional staff "read only" access to a veterans files upon authorization from a veteran.

While well intentioned, AFGE opposes this bill because of the significant potential for unintended consequences. With severe potential risks to a veteran's personal information being inadvertently shared and the potential IT problems for technology that already makes it unnecessarily

difficult for Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) employees to process claims, the potential consequences for VBA workers and veterans is significant and outweighs potential benefits.

A.N.S. to H.R. 8510, the “Strengthening Whistleblower Protections at the Department of Veterans Affairs”

AFGE supports the A.N.S. to H.R. 8510, the “Strengthening Whistleblower Protections at the Department of Veterans Affairs.” This bill is designed to protect whistleblowers at the Department of Veterans, while also rectifying some of the mistakes made by the enactment of the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act that established the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection.

AFGE would like to particularly thank Chairman Pappas (D-NH), Ranking Member Mann (R-KS), and committee staff for working collaboratively with AFGE and crafting this bill in such a way that better protects whistleblower at the department, while also respecting due process protections for federal workers.

Thank you for considering AFGE’s views on these important pieces of legislation. For additional information or questions please contact Elliot Friedman at Elliot.Friedman@afge.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel M. Horowitz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Daniel Horowitz, Ph.D.
Deputy Director of Legislation