
**Statement of
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
119th Congress Legislative Priorities
Before the Joint House and Senate
Veterans Affairs Committees**

February 26, 2025



Presented by

***CSM Gary Ginsburg, USA, Ret.
National Commander 2024-2025***

Chairmen Moran and Bost, Ranking Members Blumenthal and Takano, Members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, fellow veterans, and friends, I am CSM Gary Ginsburg, USA, Retired and the 93rd National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV).

I served four years on active duty in the U.S. Army, both in the United States and overseas, and 29 years in the U.S. Army Reserve. My service culminated with three battalion and brigade-level command sergeant major (CSM) assignments.

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV) was founded in 1896 and Congressionally chartered on August 21, 1984. JWV advocates for all veterans regardless of religion, heritage, or service period. JWV is this great nation's longest-serving Veterans Service Organization (VSO) and will celebrate its 129th anniversary in approximately two weeks on March 15, 2025.

JWV supports the military and veterans by participating in Veterans Day and Memorial Day events and volunteering at Department of Defense military bases and Department of Veterans Affairs locations (medical facilities, regional offices, and cemeteries). We mentor the next generation of military leaders through Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) and Scouting programs, grants and scholarships, Jewish Warrior Weekend, the Kiddush Cup, and Mitzvah projects.

JWV's mission message is strong and clear: fighting for military and veterans benefits and services; advocating with Congressional officials, Executive Branch departments, and the White House; and continuing to combat antisemitism, bigotry, and hate wherever and whenever it appears.

Special Focus on Hatred, Bigotry, and Antisemitism

JWV is in a unique position to have a special focus on antisemitism, expressing solidarity and unity for Israel. JWV opposes all forms of discrimination and bigotry but is especially outspoken on antisemitism. During the last four years, JWV leadership participated in numerous roundtables and called out individuals for hate speech and antisemitism. JWV will continue to be a strong voice to combat antisemitism wherever and whenever it occurs. As the only Jewish VSO, we previously issued statements condemning antisemitic events and speeches.

As instances of antisemitism across the country increase, especially following the terrorist attacks of October 7, JWV remains dedicated to condemning hate speech and addressing antisemitism at colleges and universities as well as in communities across the nation. We also stand against externally organized and funded antisemitism – it's no coincidence that, for example, students "suddenly" have a tent city with identical tents across the country.

JWV asks all Americans to be vigilant, learn, and educate our fellow citizens. JWV is proud of our advocacy for William Shemin and Tibor Rubin to receive the Medal of Honor after initially facing antisemitism and being denied nominations.

We recognize and appreciate Chairman Bost and then Ranking Member Moran's staff meeting with JWV leadership in 2024 on antisemitic activities against veterans and military communities. JWV requests your continued oversight to combat antisemitism and all hate in executive branch departments.

The world changed on the morning of October 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists attacked Israel and its citizens by launching a heinous, unprovoked, and vicious surprise attack on Israel. The world continues to face the challenges of a ceasefire and have all hostages returned home immediately. JWV condemned the assault against Israel and emphasized that terrorist actions anywhere are never justified.

JWV asks Members of Congress to join us in combating antisemitism targeted at veterans and military service members. **JWV stands ready to be a resource for you and your staff in helping to educate Americans.** We feel that education is the key to reducing antisemitic actions and incidents in America and around the world. JWV includes a listing of actions taken to address antisemitism as Appendix A, as examples of our work.

JWV Priorities for the 119th Congress **Supporting America's Veterans, Service Members,** **Their Families, Caregivers, and Survivors**

JWV works to support veterans and service members and believes that obligation extends to their families, including caregivers and survivors. JWV is and continues to be at the forefront as a voice for not only those of the Jewish faith but all veterans. JWV worked with Congress to connect veterans and their families to much-needed education, housing, and healthcare resources. As we look to the 119th Congress, JWV honors all those currently wearing the uniform of the United States and veterans. JWV continues to support our veteran and military community by advocating for the following priorities.

Addressing Toxic Exposures and Burn Pits

The landmark PACT Act was signed more than two years ago, leading to the most significant expansion of benefits to address toxic exposures. JWV, like many VSOs, made toxic exposure, burn pits, and the PACT Act a top priority. While the legislation was life-changing for many veterans, more must be done. JWV remains concerned that the VA cannot meet this increased workload within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

JWV remains committed to holding the VA accountable for implementing the PACT Act, particularly adequately funding and managing the Toxic Exposure Fund (TEF). Further, Congress must continue to provide resources, including hiring individuals to adjudicate claims and funding upgrades to Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) IT systems, and ensure Veterans Health Administration officials have clinical resources, equipment, personnel and space to treat these veterans.

Just last year, VHA and VBA requested additional funds to meet the shortfall for VBA to ensure that all veterans received their benefits in September, and Congress overwhelmingly approved. However, Congress exercised additional oversight and determined that the VHA initially reported shortfall was almost double the actual shortfall. These financial discrepancies must be addressed, and how the VA reports its funding requirements must be scrutinized for accuracy.

Major Richard Star Act – Concurrent Receipt (to be reintroduced in the 119th)

Thank you to all the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee members for your leadership in the House and Senate on concurrent receipt. JWV supports legislation for the immediate payment

of simultaneous receipt of full military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation for disabled retirees. Specifically, JWV is seeking the enactment of the Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282/S. 344 in the 118th) that authorizes the concurrent receipt of retired pay and VA disability compensation to include Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) beneficiaries who are medically retired with less than 20 years of service (Chapter 61).

This legislation had strong support, with 327 House cosponsors and 72 Senate cosponsors in the 118th Congress. Reduced retirement pay for all injured in combat and forced to retire medically communicates an awful message to our service members and their families in our all-volunteer force.

JWV urges all Senators and Representatives to include Star Act language in the FY2026 NDAA base text or as a stand-alone bill. Now is the time to end the unfair pay offset faced by almost 45,000 combat-injured veterans to receive full DoD retirement pay and VA disability pay.

Suicide Prevention and Mental Health -- Reducing Veteran Suicide

Mental health and suicide prevention remain a top priority for JWV as the suicide rate among veterans is nearly double when compared to civilians, with women veterans more than double that of female civilians. Veterans and service members must have increased access to mental health services as well as availability to alternative and community-based treatments. JWV urges Congress to fully fund the VA's suicide prevention and mental health budget. The transition from active military to civilian is complex, and the time when individuals are often at higher risk. Education and awareness are paramount and must be integral to any prevention action plan.

Actions are needed to expand research into core causes, risk factors, and protective factors for service members, veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors. JWV urges Congress to: 1) expand government and non-government funding around service members, veterans, families, caregivers, and survivor's suicide rates, their possible causes, and the most significant risk and protective factors for each of these populations; 2) ensure that both VA and Department of Defense (DoD) work together and compare their research findings as a cross-reference point; 3) ensure DoD identify higher risk individuals leaving the service and provide reports to VA as they transition their health care; and 4) explore the expansion of alternative therapies including complimentary treatment modalities such as highly trained service animals, outdoor and sports-related programs, and other innovative treatments. These alternative therapies have shown great promise in providing new options for those at-risk individuals.

In addition, JWV supports the Veterans' Informed Consent Act, which improves veterans' understanding of the risks associated with certain pharmaceuticals to address persistent high rates of veteran suicides. Specifically, this bill requires that veterans provide written informed consent for Black Box medications included in the VA formulary. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration requires black box medications to carry special warnings for medicines with a high potential for serious safety risks. Often, these warnings communicate potentially rare but dangerous side effects, or they may be used to indicate important instructions for the safe use of the drug.

Many of the Black Box medications are prescribed to veterans, and suicidal ideation is commonly one of their primary side effects. VHA Handbook states: "Veterans must be informed of the side effects and the treatment options for medications and treatments they are prescribed." The Veterans' Informed

Consent Act improves the education that veterans receive about certain risks associated with Black Box medications by requiring that all veterans provide written informed consent that they understand the risks associated with these drugs.

JWV has continued to promote the 988 Veterans Crisis Line since it went live in July 2022 to provide veterans and their loved ones with a manageable number to remember for veterans in crisis. VA and DoD must continue to educate veterans, service members, and their families on suicide prevention. More must be done, as even one suicide is one too many.

Addressing Food Insecurity in the Veteran Community

The JWV is also very concerned about the issue of food insecurity among America's veterans. While research shows that veterans are less likely to be food insecure than society at large, we have almost 8% percent of our veterans who are food insecure, and that is more than 1 million people. Veterans' participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or food stamps is lower than our nation overall.

Numerous factors are at play, including pending VA disability and appeal claims, recent inflation, and states using different formulas to determine compensation and SNAP eligibility. Congress has addressed some of these issues by supporting a 14% pay increase for junior enlisted military personnel in the fiscal year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The topic of veteran food insecurity deeply concerns the JWV since Americans do experience periods of temporary crisis. As a nation, we produce more than enough food to support everyone.

We are pleased that the VA is beginning to screen veterans on food insecurity when conducting physicals to obtain a healthcare baseline. We urge the Committees and Congress to review and address veterans' food insecurity with appropriate oversight. Appendix B is the reference source for this content.

Veterans in the Private and Public Sector Workforce in 2025

JWV remains concerned and recognizes that veterans will face new employment challenges in 2025. Veterans are an asset to our nation as many continue to serve or volunteer in their local communities, start small businesses, or serve in government as public or elected officials. Others contribute as schoolteachers, coaches, police officers, and role models, inspiring the next generation of young men and women to celebrate these accomplishments.

JWV is proud that, according to the Office of Personnel Management, in 2023, approximately 30% of the federal government workforce were veterans, many of whom were disabled veterans. The percentage of employees who served in the military is even higher at the VA and DOD.

Congress must carefully review and examine recent employee-related policy documents issued by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense. JWV urges appropriate congressional oversight to ensure that the VA and DOD human resources actions are carefully reviewed for short and long-term considerations.

Mission-critical activities and requirements must not be compromised. Our active-duty service members must have the personnel and financial resources to provide a strong national defense. Our veterans must have a fully resourced and staffed VA to provide them with the benefits and state-of-the-art medical care they have earned and deserve.

Enacting the Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act

JWV wants to thank Chairmen Moran and Bost, Ranking Members Blumenthal and Takano, and all committee members for working on the bipartisan Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (S.141). The President signed the Act into law on January 2, 2025.

This critical legislation amends various Department of Veterans Affairs authorities related to health care, economic opportunity, disability and memorial affairs, veteran homelessness, and oversight and investigations related to caregivers and their survivors. It provides VBA and Board of Veterans Appeals officials full funding to improve processes.

JWV recognizes and appreciates the efforts of all committee staff members in negotiating and securing votes in both the full House and Senate. JWV will continue to monitor VA's regulatory actions as it implements the Dole Act.

Delivering Timely, High-Quality Benefits and Services

In 2024, the VA processed a record number of veterans' claims. JWV will continue to hold the VA accountable and urge them to continue being innovative and providing timely service to all veterans. JWV will also continue to oppose using unlicensed individuals who are taking fees for representing veterans' claims. Service organizations are accredited and provide this service at no cost.

Supporting Women Veterans

According to the VA, women are the fastest-growing veterans using VA services. JWV is committed to addressing the specialized health care needs of our women veterans, including increasing cancer screenings, improving mental health care and access, addressing infertility, and reducing intimate partner violence. JWV supports the provisions of the Deborah Sampson Act and remains committed to improving maternal health and ensuring that all women feel welcome and receive equitable treatment and care.

Women veterans transitioning out of uniform face unique challenges because of their service experiences or other barriers. VA expects women's healthcare enrollees to grow from the current 10% to as high as 19% by 2025. While VA has recognized weaknesses in its data, it has not implemented corrective actions to address them. VA must expand its efforts to remove barriers to ensure all veterans receive the same care, services, and benefits they earned through their service.

JWV urges Congress to: 1) provide gender-specific care at all VA facilities and increase the number of providers with expertise in women's health; 2) recognize the unique mental health needs of women veterans and work to reduce the suicide rate and substance dependency; and 3) eliminate harassment and inappropriate comments from male veterans so that women veterans feel welcome, safe, and do not delay getting needed care.

Ending Veteran Homelessness

More veterans need homeless assistance resources than the existing capacity could help. JWV commends the VA for housing more than 47,000 veterans experiencing homelessness in 2024. These veterans were provided with the safe and stable environments they deserved. As a member of the National Coalition on Homeless Veterans, JWV continues supporting efforts to permanently reduce homelessness.

We urge the VA and Congress to remain committed to reducing homelessness among veterans. JWV was pleased that the Elizabeth Dole Act included the HOME Act. One homeless veteran is one too many!

Arlington National Cemetery Pending Eligibility Changes

JWV continues to advocate for a long-term legislative solution to preserve burial with full military honors for countless elderly and women veterans who could lose that earned benefit.

JWV's National Executive Director, Ken Greenberg, Co-Chairs the Retired Affairs Committee of The Military Coalition (TMC). TMC, representing 5.5 million members, strongly supports H.R. 1413, The Expanding America's National Cemetery Act. The Act seeks to transform an existing national cemetery and sustain equivalent military honors provided at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) as it reaches capacity. A summary statement is below.

Expanding America's National Cemetery Act H.R.1413 (in the 118th): A proposal for eligibility reduction at ANC is approaching the final steps of the federal rule-making process. Congressional action is required to protect the burial benefit with full military honors. The FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) required the DoD to develop a plan for ANC to continue operations "well into the future." This resulted in the DoD proposal to reduce eligibility and extend ANC operations by 150 years. The proposed reduction would render countless veterans, retirees, and nearly all female veterans ineligible.

The bipartisan Expanding America's National Cemetery Act would authorize transforming an existing VA-run national cemetery into the "next ANC" that can afford equivalent honors as the ANC reaches capacity. ANC will not run out of room for another 42 years, affording time to develop a longer-term solution. A gradual transition to the "next ANC" over the next 40 years will allow our nation to continue to honor families for lifetimes of service and sacrifice.

Despite its Southern Expansion and eligibility restrictions designed to extend the cemetery's life, ANC eventually will run out of room. Changing the rules is a cost-cutting measure that comes on the backs of military retirees and others whose final plans included burial at a national cemetery. It's also shortsighted because a long-term solution involving the transformation of an existing VA national cemetery is cost-sensitive and establishes efficiencies by relying on existing VA expertise.

Survivor Benefits Love Lives on Act

JWV joins with others in the military survivor community to thank Senators Rafael Warnock and Jerry Moran for their leadership on the Love Lives on Act. The proposed bipartisan legislation is the

first comprehensive approach to allowing eligible military surviving spouses to retain survivor benefits upon remarriage before age 55.

The Love Lives on Act will ensure that surviving military spouses retain eligibility for survivor benefits from the DoD and the VA if they remarry before age 55. This is an unjust situation that must be rectified. This restriction is imposed on military surviving families but not on the surviving families of first responders. For example, most U.S. surviving spouses of fallen firefighters and law enforcement officers can remarry before age 55 and maintain survivor pensions and benefits. Our nation's fallen military heroes deserve no less.

JWV supports the Love Lives on Act to honor and strengthen our Nation's Gold Star Families. We look forward to working with Senators Warnock and Moran to pass this critical legislation.

Fixing VA's Electronic Health Record System

JWV remains concerned that VA continues to experience issues with deploying its electronic health record system and commends VA for pausing deployments in 2024. The combination of cost overruns and lack of proper training for clinicians and staff jeopardizes patients' safety. Patients' safety is paramount, and JWV urges the VA to improve training for its staff and hold its own and Oracle officials accountable for the system's failures.

JWV insists VA learn from and take corrective actions to prevent system failures before any deployments are initiated in 2025 and beyond. JWV urges Congress to ensure patient safety is maintained during any future implementations.

Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act of 2023

The U.S. Coast Guard carries out vital national security missions funded by Department of Homeland Security appropriations. As a result, Coast Guard personnel are more likely to experience pay interruptions during a government shutdown. The threat of a shutdown brings unnecessary hardship to these men, women, and their families.

JWV urges Congress to pass the Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act, legislation that would guarantee Coast Guard personnel are paid during a government shutdown.

VA Final Rule Cuts Emergency Medical Air Transportation Reimbursement Rates Putting Veterans at Risk

JWV has led the fight in the VSO community on the VA's proposed rule (RIN 2900-AP89, Change in Rates VA Pays for Special Modes of Transportation) that cuts the VA reimbursement rate for emergency air medical services to below the costs of the services themselves. As published, it would put more than 2.7 million rural veterans in our country who are enrolled in the VHA and 4.8 million rural veterans overall at risk of losing life-saving emergency air transportation.

When the VA published the final rule on February 16, 2023, it made no changes but delayed the effective date to February 16, 2024. The effective date was again postponed to February 16, 2025. On September 6, 2024, due to tremendous pressure from Congress and the VSO community, the VA announced a further delay to February 16, 2029.

JWV appreciates the delay but remains concerned about the VA's continued misinterpretation of the number of Veterans receiving emergency air medical care to and from non-VA facilities. JWV knows both SVAC and HVAC leadership are supportive of this action.

JWV also strongly supported (from the 118th Congress) S.1803 and H.R.5530, the Veterans Emergency Transportation Access Act. This legislation is a commonsense, bipartisan approach that, if passed, would require the VA to conduct a rigorous review process and consult with stakeholders meaningfully before proceeding with any reimbursement changes. We encourage Congress to pass this legislation to ensure Veterans have access to lifesaving air and ground ambulance transport.

Policy – National Standards of Practice for Eye Care Health Care Professionals

JWV remains concerned about actions the VA has taken in recent years to dilute surgical eye-care standards in this program. Specifically, the VA modified its Community Care “Standardized Episode of Care (SEOC): Eye Care Comprehensive” guideline by removing language that has historically provided that “only ophthalmologists can perform invasive procedures, including injections, lasers, and eye surgery.” By removing this sentence, VA is implicitly authorizing optometrists to perform ophthalmic surgery on veterans they refer under the Community Care program in the few states where permitted by state licensure laws.

JWV understands that the VA removed this language without allowing the public or veteran community to comment. We are highly concerned that this vital patient safeguard was removed and poses an increased risk to veterans requiring surgical eye care. Veterans have benefitted from established, consistent, high-quality surgical eye care for decades because the VA maintained a long-standing policy that restricts the performance of therapeutic laser eye surgery to ophthalmologists and medical or osteopathic doctors who specialize in eye and vision care in VA medical facilities.

This policy is consistent with the standard of medical care in most states. It also ensures a system-wide quality standard for surgical eye care and that all veterans have access to an eye care provider with the appropriate education, training, and professional experience needed to perform their eye surgery.

JWV remains concerned that the VA wants to adopt a national standard of practice that could allow optometrists to perform surgery on the eyes of veterans, even though optometrists do not have the necessary level of medical education or surgical training to be surgeons. While JWV acknowledges that optometrists play a critical role in delivering quality eye health care for our nation’s veterans, we firmly believe that optometrists should not be allowed to perform eye surgery on veterans because they do not possess the requisite training or medical degree.

JWV urges the VA to immediately reinstate the SEOC's language, stating that “only ophthalmologists can perform invasive procedures, including injections, lasers, and eye surgery.” JWV remains ready to work with the VA, HVAC, and SVAC officials as the VA seeks to establish national standards of practice for optometry and ophthalmology within the VA health system.

National Museum of American Jewish Military History (NMAJMH)

Do you know about our museum, which is located in our headquarters building? JWV's leadership recognized the need to bring the stories of Jewish servicemen and women to the public because if Jews do not tell our stories nor share our message, who will?

The National Museum of American Jewish Military History (located near Dupont Circle) was chartered in 1958. The museum is dedicated to recognizing, preserving, and commemorating the service, heroism, and sacrifices of Jewish men and women who have fought in a war and contributed to the peace and freedom of America. The Hall of Heroes, which highlights the 18 Jewish Medal of Honor Recipients, is an exhibit that should not be missed.

We urge you to visit our museum. I am sure you will be surprised to learn about the long and extensive U.S. military history of Jewish faith members.

Conclusion

JWV has a long history of advocating for a strong national defense and fair recognition and compensation for veterans, service members, and their families. We are proud to share and work with Members of Congress and colleagues at other VSOs. There is strength in numbers, and by working together, we can continue to ensure that all veterans, service members, and their family members receive the benefits earned and deserve.

We thank you for the opportunity to present our legislative and policy priorities to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees today. JWV also appreciates the ability to have open dialogue with all of the members of both committees and the support of the hard-working committee staff on both sides of the aisle.

God Bless the United States of America and all the brave men and women in uniform who have served and continue to serve this great nation. This concludes our testimony, and we look forward to answering your questions.

No Government Funding

For the record, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA do not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.

SPECIAL FOCUS ON ANTISEMITISM

This page serves as the sixth edition of a series focused on JWV's work on combating antisemitism.

JWV opposes all bigotry, especially antisemitism, and is committed to monitoring and responding to it. We urge all Americans to stay vigilant, learn, and educate others.

JWV Demands Investigation into Antisemitism in California National Guard November 1, 2024

Dear General Martin:

JWV demands that the Department of the Army Inspector General (IG) investigate the allegations of antisemitism against the Adjutant General (TAG) of the California National Guard, Major General Matthew Beevers.

JWV has been monitoring periodic reports of antisemitism by leaders in the California National Guard from the media and our members currently serving in the Guard. The most recent report of antisemitism by a California National Guard leader) includes the official California National Guard Inspector General (IG) report in which two General Officers (GOs) confirmed under oath that the Adjutant General (TAG) of the California National Guard, Major General Matthew Beevers, made repeated antisemitic remarks, to include using a derogatory term for Jews, akin to the N-word for African Americans.

First and most troubling is the California IG's conclusion does not match the reported evidence of two GOs and second the California TAG review was conducted by its own IG who is a direct report, thus creating a conflict of interest. As a result, JWV urges a follow up investigation be conducted:

The allegations, reported to be overheard by multiple officers, were confirmed in the California IG report in the testimony under oath of two General Officers. (One of those General Officers was the prior TAG of California MG David Baldwin.) The California IG, however, in opposition to the evidence, chose to conclude that there was no evidence of antisemitic comments made by MG Beevers.

Thus, The California National Guard IG should NOT have conducted the original investigation. The Department of the Army IG must now conduct a proper investigation where MG Beevers' influence over the subordinate IG officials is not a factor. The California IG's conclusion demonstrates a conflict of interest and supports the need for a Department of Army IG investigation. JWV requests you swiftly implement this follow up investigation.

The rise of antisemitism in the military must be addressed swiftly as there is no place for hatred and bigotry in the military. A complete and thorough second review of the allegations of antisemitic comments by Major General Beevers must be completed by the Army IG. No matter the conclusion, JWV believes the effects of antisemitism on the careers of the Jewish service members serving in the California National Guard should be examined. JWV members continue to be concerned and have noted a loss in confidence in California leadership from a culture of antisemitism and reprisals.

JWV appreciates your immediate attention to our request for Department of Army IG review and investigation. Our National Executive Director, Mr. Ken Greenberg is our official point of contact and can be reached at kgreenberg@jwv.org.

Sincerely,

Gary Ginsburg, USA (retired)
National Commander (2024-2025)

JWV Commends U.S. Senate for Rejecting Resolutions to Block Israel Arms Sales

November 21, 2024

The Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America opposed the Joint Resolutions of Disapproval to block more than \$20 billion of U.S. military aid to Israel. The resolutions were rejected by the Senate on November 20. JWV appreciates the overwhelming vote of 18-79.

"JWV supports Israel's right to defend itself and commends the Senators for rejecting each of the resolutions considered," said Gary Ginsburg, JWV National Commander and retired U.S. Army veteran. "Now is the time to stand with Israel. As the United States' only steadfast ally and only democracy in the Middle East, denying the requisite military aid creates weakness, which only encourages Iran and its proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah, to act with additional attacks on Israel."

Since the October 7th attacks, Israel has been battling Hamas and Hezbollah, while other Iranian terrorist proxies have launched daily attacks on Israeli cities and Jewish and Arab civilians. Ginsburg noted, "The immediate release of the remaining hostages is paramount, and we must continue to honor the memories of those lost in the brutal attacks of October 7."

JWV applauds the U.S. Senate's rejection of the Joint Resolutions of Disapproval to block U.S. military aid to Israel. This action strengthens Israel's security and deterring regional war.

JWV Signs Onto Letter Urging UN Action for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

November 25, 2024

Condensed version.

Read the full letter here: tinyurl.com/hadassahletter

Dear UN Representatives:

As the UN's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence launches this year, Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America and the undersigned 65 organizations join together to express our deep concern about the rising levels of violence against women and girls around the world. In particular, we were deeply alarmed by the dramatic 50% increase in 2023 in conflict-related sexual violence worldwide, as documented in the April 2024 Report of The Secretary General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. We urge you to help deter future acts of gender-based violence in conflict by advancing justice and accountability.

As you work to address and mitigate gender-based and conflict-related violence around the world, we urge you to include response to the sexual violence committed by Hamas on October 7th. We urge you to take the following actions: (1) declare Hamas' documented systematic weaponization of sexual violence a crime against humanity; (2) list Hamas in the Annex in the 2025 Report of the Secretary General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence as a party credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict; and (3) establish and encourage all states to adopt an international protocol for responding to conflict-related sexual violence.

Evidence of Hamas' crimes against humanity has been collected and examined by multiple bodies from around the world, including the UN. The mission report released earlier this year on Sexual Violence in Conflict presented compelling evidence of widespread gender-based and sexual violence against women and girls committed during the attacks on October 7th, 2023. The report found a pattern of naked, often bound female bodies,

some bearing execution-style gunshot wounds to the head, in multiple locations. It also found "clear and convincing information" of rape and sexualized torture being committed against hostages kidnapped during the October 7th, 2023, terror attacks and evidence of sexual violence.

The UN Secretary-General's Annual Report on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence incorporated Special Representative Patten's report finding a pattern of sexual violence in three locations on October 7th, 2023. A June report by the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict went further, clearly identifying a pattern of sexual violence against Israeli women and girls on October 7th, 2023, and attributing it to Hamas. In his request on May 5th, 2024, to issue international arrest warrants, ICC Special Prosecutor Karim Khan listed "rape and other acts of sexual violence during captivity as crimes against humanity and as war crimes" among the international crimes that the three Hamas leaders were suspected to have committed on October 7th, 2023.

Multiple independent organizations and news outlets also conducted their own investigations and found evidence of Hamas' weaponization of rape. The European Union sanctioned three terrorist organizations, including Hamas, for widespread sexual and gender-based violence in a systemic manner on October 7th, 2023. The US Department of Justice charged Hamas leaders with committing acts of terrorism on October 7th, 2023, including the use of sexual violence as a weapon of brutality and the rape and genital mutilation of Israeli women.

Despite this overwhelming body of evidence, the UN has yet to list Hamas in the Annex to the Report of the Secretary-General as a party credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict or hold the terrorist organization accountable for these crimes against humanity. We urge you to please take swift action to hold Hamas accountable and send a clear signal to others around the world that sexual violence against women and girls will never be tolerated or excused.

We recognize that responses to conflict-related sexual violence vary greatly among states, which can impact efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. Thus, we urge the UN to put forward a singular, comprehensive international protocol that explicitly outlines the specific actions states must take in the event of conflict-related sexual violence.

We further urge the UN to adopt a resolution validating this international protocol and calling on nations to follow these provisions while cooperating with international mechanisms established to investigate and prosecute conflict-related sexual violence. This international protocol should outline guidance for ensuring survivors receive timely and appropriate medical and mental health care, as well as legal assistance. It should also delineate standard practices for gathering, documenting, and preserving evidence in a way that helps facilitate effective prosecution of perpetrators.

We urge you to take decisive action against gender-based and sexual violence in conflict by focusing your efforts on providing justice and accountability—including accountability for Hamas—to promote greater deterrence of gender-based violence in the future. Further, we ask you to work together to develop and adopt a strong international protocol and related resolution to improve country responses to conflict-related sexual violence worldwide. We remain committed to taking bold action against gender-based violence in all its forms.



Reducing Policy Barriers to SNAP Participation by Food-Insecure Veterans

Around 7.5 percent of all veterans—nearly 1.4 million—are food insecure, and they are consistently less likely than their nonveteran peers to be enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). A RAND study sought to address gaps in understanding about veterans' need for food and nutrition resources, their rates of SNAP participation, and factors affecting their participation.

Although it is a national program, SNAP is administered by states. An analysis of state SNAP policies highlighted potential facilitators, barriers, and policy actions to boost food-insecure veterans' SNAP participation and long-term food security.

Addressing Veteran Food Insecurity Is a National Priority

After military service, veterans must find new housing, employment, and support networks—and they may be doing so while coping with service-related physical or mental health conditions, which increase their risk of food insecurity. Food insecurity is, in turn, associated with higher rates of depression, suicide, and homelessness. For these reasons, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) routinely screens veterans during primary care visits and connects those who are food insecure with SNAP and other nutrition resources.

However, food-insecure veterans who do not receive VA care may be unaware that they are eligible for SNAP. Others might resist participating in programs that they perceive as undermining their self-

reliance or taking food away from people in need. The figure on the following page shows a decade of disparity in food-insecure veterans' and nonveterans' SNAP participation.

Older and Disabled Food-Insecure Veterans Are Least Likely to Get the Support They Need

Several demographic characteristics were associated with lower SNAP enrollment among food-insecure veterans in national survey data, but two differences stood out:

- Food-insecure veterans age 70 and older had a 29-percent estimated probability of being enrolled in SNAP, compared with 39 percent for similar nonveterans.
- Food-insecure veterans who were not in the labor force due to a mental or physical illness had a 45-percent estimated probability of being enrolled in SNAP, compared with 54 percent for their nonveteran peers.

Most VA benefits are included in SNAP eligibility income calculations. These benefits could be insufficient to prevent food insecurity while disqualifying veterans from SNAP; more research is needed to determine the extent to which they pose a barrier to SNAP participation. But the evidence indicates that food-insecure veterans who received VA disability payments and other VA benefits had lower SNAP participation than food-insecure veteran peers who did not receive VA benefits.

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■ Food Insecurity Among Veterans Examining the Discrepancy Between Veteran Food Insecurity and Use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

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SOURCE: Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation**YEAR:** 2023**LINK:** <https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA1363-2>**KEYWORDS:** Food Insecurity, Military Veterans, Nutrition, Poverty, Social Services and Welfare**SUMMARY:**

“Food insecurity is linked to poorer physical and mental health, including an increased risk of suicide. Therefore, addressing the needs of food-insecure veterans is a national priority. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs conducts routine screenings to identify veterans at risk of food insecurity and refer them to sources of support. Nonetheless, food-insecure veterans are consistently less likely than their nonveteran peers to be enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This research adds to the evidence base on food-insecure veterans who do and do not enroll in SNAP, as well as differences between food-insecure veterans’ and nonveterans’ reasons for starting and ending — or losing — SNAP benefits and patterns in these groups’ use of other safety-net programs. For example, veterans’ benefits could push their income above the eligibility threshold for SNAP. Although it is a federal program, SNAP is administered by the states, and the RAND analyses highlighted potential policy options to facilitate SNAP access for food-insecure veterans.

Two groups of food-insecure veterans were much less likely to participate in SNAP than their nonveteran peers: older veterans and those who were not in the workforce because of a disability. Increasing SNAP access for food-insecure veterans who are falling through the cracks is one immediate step toward eliminating food insecurity, but there is also a need for early interventions to identify and support service members who are at risk of becoming food insecure as veterans.”

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

- This research employed three data sources to examine the participation of food-insecure veterans and nonveterans in SNAP.
- Findings showed that veterans are less likely than nonveterans to be food insecure. However, compared with similar nonveterans, veterans who are food insecure are consistently less likely to be enrolled in SNAP.
- The data also revealed that 7.5% of veterans, around 1.4 million individuals, experienced food insecurity, and 4.9% received SNAP benefits.
- Additionally, food-insecure veterans, especially those disabled and not in the labor force, exhibited lower SNAP participation rates than food-insecure nonveterans. Differences in SNAP enrollment were observed among older veterans and those receiving VA benefits. The primary reason for food-insecure veterans discontinuing or losing SNAP benefits was an increase in income.

Implications

FOR PRACTICE

Implications for practice include: (1) enhanced early intervention to raise awareness of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) among at-risk service members who may face food insecurity upon transitioning to civilian life, (2) expanded food insecurity screening efforts, with a particular emphasis on targeting disabled and older veterans to ensure timely assistance and education regarding SNAP eligibility, and (3) broadened screening efforts for hard to reach groups that target vulnerable veterans who are not under VA care, older veterans, and those with disabilities.

FOR POLICY

At the state and federal levels, reforms to SNAP that better support food-insecure veterans and address disparities compared to nonveteran counterparts are needed. Stronger federal guidance is recommended to ensure uniformity and consistency in SNAP eligibility criteria, especially for older and disabled veterans. Federal guidance can play a pivotal role in encouraging states to adopt policies that promote SNAP participation and foster a supportive environment for food insecure veterans nationwide. Interstate compacts that deconflict state-specific policies could foster a more streamlined, seamless, and equitable approach across regions. Broad-based categorical eligibility, which simplifies the application process and raises income eligibility thresholds, should also be among the policy considerations to improve equity and enhance the SNAP program's effectiveness. Specifically, policymakers should conduct a thorough review of SNAP eligibility criteria, with a focus on ensuring that policies adequately accommodate the unique circumstances of disabled veterans.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research includes leveraging the quasi-longitudinal nature of the Current Population Survey (CPS) data to explore the intricate relationship between SNAP and U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) disability benefits among food-insecure veterans. To enhance veterans' food access, subsequent research should focus on monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives that have proven successful as well as the social and economic precursors to food insecurity among veterans. This may be particularly important for those not under VA care and therefore not routinely screened. Further research is also encouraged reviewing collaborations between the U.S. Department of Defense and the VA to identify transitioning service members at risk of food insecurity. Addressing the lower SNAP enrollment rates among veterans necessitates research into the underlying factors, such as eligibility challenges, perceived ineligibility, social stigma associated with SNAP participation, and the influence of messaging on nutrition assistance. Additionally, longitudinal tracking of the implementation of these recommendations and their effectiveness in increasing veterans' utilization of nutrition assistance programs will provide insights into interventions that facilitate food-insecure veterans' access to essential support. Future research should also encompass investigating state-level variations in SNAP participation policies and assessing the influence of veterans' military service factors on their food security status. There is also a need for better understanding of how veterans' experiences as service members, such as their paygrade and years of service, affect their likelihood of becoming food insecure as veterans.

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Jewish War Veterans (JWV) of the United States of America National Commander Gary I. Ginsburg (2024-2025)



Gary I. Ginsburg has been the JWV National Commander since September 12, 2024, and previously served as the JWV National Vice Commander during 2023 and 2024. He has also served as Department Commander and Post Commander in New York State. He is a life member of both the JWV and the National Museum of American Jewish Military History. He is part of a JWV family tradition that spans three generations in upstate New York.

As the JWV National Commander, he advocates for America's 18 million veterans, travels across the country, and represents the organization at local, state, and national events. He also leads the JWV effort to counter racism, bigotry, and antisemitism wherever the source and whomever the target. He has motivated and inspired many new members to join the JWV. He educates children about the value of veterans who served our nation in defense of freedom. He meets with elected officials, leaders of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, other veteran service organizations, and leadership of Jewish organizations to promote the priorities of the JWV. He has also begun to address the interest of American veterans residing in Israel.

He serves on the Syracuse University Veterans Advisory Council and is the JWV representative in support of the local city-county Veterans Advisory Committee. In 2017 and 2018, he earned the President's Volunteer Service Award Gold level for assisting transitioning veterans at four locations: Rochester, Fort Drum, West Point, and Syracuse.

He served four years on active duty in the U.S. Army, both in the United States and overseas, and additionally served honorably for 29 years in the U.S. Army Reserve. His military experience culminated in three assignments as a battalion and brigade-level command sergeant major (CSM) or senior enlisted advisor, including medical, engineering, and personnel services units. He also served in four sergeant major staff assignments before his CSM appointment in 1999. He has earned numerous military and civilian awards and recognition for local, state, and national volunteer service.

He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Syracuse University and a graduate degree (using his GI Bill educational benefits) from the University of Southern California. Gary Ginsburg resides in Webster, N.Y., near Rochester, N.Y.

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