



Statement for the Record

Paul Shipley
National Commander
AMVETS

The House Veterans Affairs Committee

March 18, 2026

Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the Committee:

As the nation's most inclusive Congressionally chartered veteran service organization, AMVETS represents the interests of more than 20 million veterans from the Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve components. We appreciate the Committee's continued focus on practical reforms to improve access, strengthen accountability, and deliver better outcomes for veterans and their families. AMVETS is proud to offer our views on the following proposals.

I. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS SUPPORTED BY AMVETS

Get Justice-Involved Veterans Behavioral Assistance and Care for Key Health Outcomes to Maintain Empowerment (BACK HOME) Act

AMVETS strongly supports the Get Justice-Involved Veterans BACK HOME Act. At our National Convention in August 2025, AMVETS adopted a resolution affirming our support for justice-involved veterans, including those who are incarcerated, and this legislation directly reflects that commitment. Veterans do not forfeit their service or their need for care when they become justice-involved.

Many incarcerated veterans are living with the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), military sexual trauma (MST), and other service-related conditions that often go untreated. This bill would establish a pilot program to provide mental health care to incarcerated veterans, prioritize those with service-connected conditions, prohibit copayments, and rely on VA providers to ensure continuity and accountability. AMVETS also strongly supports the bill's provisions encouraging veteran-specific housing units and tailored programming within correctional facilities.

The legislation also includes practical reforms that can improve reentry and long-term outcomes, including the automatic resumption of compensation and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) upon release and improved data collection on incarcerated veterans. AMVETS believes that this bill reflects an important principle: supporting veterans means meeting them where they are, especially when they are at their most vulnerable.

Discussion Draft, Toxic Exposure Advisory Committee Establishment Act

AMVETS also supports the Toxic Exposure Advisory Committee Establishment Act. Toxic exposure remains one of the most consequential and complex challenges facing the veteran community, and the VA must be equipped with stronger mechanisms to identify, assess, and respond to emerging threats. For too long, veterans have had to wait years for science and policy to catch up with their lived experience.

This legislation would establish a dedicated Advisory Committee on Toxic Exposure to evaluate known and emerging exposures, incorporate scientific and medical expertise, and ensure that the experiences of veterans inform the VA's decision-making process. AMVETS is especially encouraged by the Committee's authority to review exposures not yet recognized under existing presumptions of service connection and to recommend further research where warranted.

The bill's emphasis on transparency and public input is equally important. Veterans, families, researchers, and advocates should have meaningful opportunities to contribute to this process, and the Secretary should be required to respond publicly to the Committee's recommendations. Toxic exposure policy is ultimately about trust, and this legislation would help strengthen that trust by making the system more proactive, transparent, and accountable.

Bill to Establish the Office for Toxic Exposure Implementation and Oversight and an Assistant Secretary for Toxic Exposure Coordination

AMVETS supports this legislation to establish an Office for Toxic Exposure Implementation and Oversight within the VA, led by an Assistant Secretary for Toxic Exposure Coordination. The PACT Act was a major step forward, but legislation alone is not enough. Success depends on execution, oversight, and sustained leadership.

Toxic exposure issues cut across the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, research, outreach, and interagency coordination. Without centralized leadership, those efforts risk becoming fragmented or inconsistent. This bill would provide clear accountability for implementing the PACT Act and other toxic exposure laws and help ensure that veterans are not harmed by bureaucratic silos or unclear lines of authority.

AMVETS supports this legislation because it complements broader efforts to modernize the VA's response to toxic exposure. Advisory structures and research are essential, but they must be matched by operational leadership that can translate findings into action. Veterans exposed during service deserve a system that is organized, responsive, and accountable.

H.R. 210, Dental Care for Veterans Act

AMVETS has been a longtime supporter of the intent behind the Dental Care for Veterans Act. Oral health is health care, and veterans should not be forced to navigate an artificial divide between dental care and the rest of the services necessary to maintain their health, quality of life, and long-term well-being. Under current law, access to VA dental care remains sharply limited, leaving many veterans with serious oral health needs without meaningful options for treatment.

Untreated dental conditions can worsen chronic illness, contribute to pain and infection, impair nutrition, undermine mental health, and create barriers to employment and daily functioning. This legislation would correct that inequity by requiring the Secretary to furnish dental care in the same manner as any other medical service, while phasing in eligibility in an orderly way.

This reform is long overdue. Veterans do not experience their health in silos, and the VA should never deliver care that way. Expanding access to dental care would reduce unmet need, prevent avoidable complications, and help ensure that lower-income veterans and those without other coverage are not left behind.

H.R. 1391, Student Veteran Benefit Restoration Act of 2025

AMVETS strongly supports the Student Veteran Benefit Restoration Act of 2025. Veterans who use their earned education benefits should never be penalized for the misconduct of institutions that engage in fraud, misrepresentation, or other serious failures. When schools collapse, lose approval, or are found to have deceived students, veterans should not be left to absorb the loss.

This bill would restore educational entitlement to veterans affected by institutional fraud or failure and ensure that benefits used during periods of misconduct are not charged against a veteran's eligibility. Veterans upheld their end of the bargain, and institutions that fail to do so should be held accountable instead of the students they misled.

AMVETS also supports the requirement that institutions repay funds received under fraudulent or noncompliant circumstances, along with the bill's due process protections for schools contesting repayment determinations. This legislation protects both the integrity of veterans' education benefits and the trust veterans must be able to place in the system when they pursue higher education.

VA Transparency and Reform of the Upper Senior Tenure (TRUST) Act

AMVETS supports the VA TRUST Act. Transparency and accountability within the VA are essential to maintaining the trust of veterans, their families, and the public. This bill would increase visibility into compensation practices for senior VA executive employees by requiring additional reporting on awards, bonuses, and funding sources.

AMVETS believes transparency is not punitive; it is a core component of good governance. Veterans expect that appropriated resources are used responsibly and that VA leadership is held

to high standards of performance and accountability. Providing clearer insight into executive compensation strengthens confidence in the system and promotes appropriate oversight.

At the same time, AMVETS recognizes the importance of attracting and retaining qualified leadership. Aligning pay structures with existing Senior Executive Service frameworks can promote consistency while preserving flexibility to reward performance. For those reasons, we support this legislation as a balanced effort to improve transparency and trust.

H.R. 3183, Supporting Access to Falls Education and Prevention and Strengthening Training Efforts and Promoting Safety (SAFE STEPS) for Veterans Act of 2025

AMVETS strongly supports the SAFE STEPS for Veterans Act of 2025. Falls are a leading cause of injury, hospitalization, and loss of independence among veterans, particularly aging veterans and those with service-connected disabilities. Preventing falls requires a coordinated, system-wide approach rather than isolated local efforts.

This legislation would establish an Office of Falls Prevention within the Veterans Health Administration to lead and oversee prevention efforts across the VA. AMVETS strongly supports the creation of a centralized office to set standards of care, identify deficiencies, support research, improve data collection, and coordinate home modification and adaptation programs. Those reforms would help ensure that prevention strategies are consistent, evidence-based, and effectively implemented nationwide.

AMVETS also supports the bill's requirements for routine falls risk assessments, expanded prevention services in nursing homes and extended care settings, improved safe patient handling practices, and stronger interagency coordination. By taking a proactive approach to falls prevention, this legislation would improve safety, preserve independence, and enhance quality of life for veterans.

VA Research Reform Act of 2025

Additionally, AMVETS strongly supports the VA Research Reform Act of 2025. Research conducted by the VA has long played a vital role in advancing treatments, improving care delivery, and deepening our understanding of the health conditions facing veterans. To remain effective, however, the department's research enterprise must be coordinated, efficient, transparent, and focused on results that improve veterans' lives.

This bill would strengthen that enterprise by establishing a centralized VA research data system, improving oversight, reducing duplication, modernizing approval processes, and requiring major research projects to include veteran impact forecasts and translation plans. AMVETS is particularly encouraged by the bill's focus on moving high-impact research into practice so that promising findings are not delayed or lost within the system.

II. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS SUPPORTED WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

H.R. 1732, GUARD VA Benefits Act

AMVETS supports the intent of the GUARD VA Benefits Act to protect veterans from predatory actors who seek to profit from the claims process by charging unauthorized fees. We have long supported efforts to uphold the integrity of the VA-accredited representation system and to ensure that veterans have access to trained, accountable, and free assistance through accredited veteran service organizations.

At the same time, we believe that any legislation addressing fraud must be carefully tailored to target claim sharks without creating unintended consequences for veterans seeking legitimate help. The problem is not veterans asking for assistance; the problem is that individuals and organizations are exploiting that need for personal gain outside the accredited system. Without clear safeguards, enforcement could be applied too broadly and create confusion about what forms of help are permissible.

We urge Congress to distinguish clearly between predatory, unaccredited actors charging illegal fees and veterans or organizations acting in good faith. Enforcement should focus on systemic abuse, provide clarity on permissible activities, and avoid creating new barriers to earned benefits. Fraud prevention is necessary, but it must be precise, and AMVETS stands ready to work with the Committee to ensure this bill protects veterans without harming them.

H.R. 3869, Every Veteran Housed Act

AMVETS also supports the intent of the Every Veteran Housed Act, which seeks to expand access to homelessness assistance for individuals who have served in uniform and are at risk of falling through the cracks of the current system. Preventing and ending veteran homelessness remains one of AMVETS' highest priorities, as demonstrated by our recent work at the AMVETS Family Service Center in South Strabane, Pennsylvania. We strongly support efforts to ensure that no one who has worn the uniform is left without access to safe, stable housing and supportive services.

This bill addresses a real gap. There are individuals with military service, particularly those with shorter periods of service or service in certain components, who may not meet the statutory definition of veteran for some purposes but still face homelessness, mental health challenges, and barriers to reintegration. AMVETS agrees that these individuals should not be ignored and that targeted solutions are needed.

However, AMVETS has concerns about redefining the term "veteran" for purposes of eligibility. That definition is foundational to Title 38, and even limited changes could create unintended consequences across the broader benefits system. AMVETS believes Congress should pursue alternative approaches that expand access to homelessness services without altering the core statutory definition of veteran, and we stand ready to work with the Committee to refine the bill accordingly.

H.R. 5203, To Direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to Update Directives Regarding the Management of Acute Sexual Assault

Additionally, AMVETS fundamentally supports the underlying intent of this legislation to improve the VA's response to veterans who experience acute sexual assault. Survivors require timely, trauma-informed, and clinically appropriate care, and the VA must be prepared to respond with consistency, sensitivity, and professionalism across all facilities. This bill takes critical steps by requiring updated directives, improved training, access to certified forensic examiners, rape kits, referrals, mental health support, and clearer law enforcement guidance.

AMVETS also supports the goal of ensuring that every veteran who presents after an assault receives care that reflects best practices and minimizes the risk of retraumatization. Survivors should have access to comprehensive clinical evaluation, appropriate treatment, coordinated follow-up services, and strong mental health support.

However, AMVETS has concerns regarding provisions that extend beyond the bill's core objective of standardizing and strengthening the VA's response to sexual assault. We believe this legislation should remain tightly focused on survivor care, clinical clarity, and accountability. AMVETS stands ready to work with the Committee to ensure the final bill preserves that focus and provides clear, workable guidance for VA providers.

III. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS OPPOSED BY AMVETS

A Bill to Provide for the Modernization of the Electronic Health Record System and Other Health Information Technology Activities and Systems of the Department of Veterans Affairs

AMVETS does not support this legislation at this time. While we share the goal of a modern, interoperable, and veteran-centered electronic health record (EHR) system, AMVETS believes the VA must see the current rollout plan through before Congress compels a broader restructuring or creates new off-ramps that could further destabilize implementation. EHR modernization is not just an information technology issue; it is a patient safety issue that affects clinical workflows, medication management, care coordination, scheduling, referrals, and the integrity of veterans' medical information.

AMVETS agrees that transparency, clinical input, system stability, and measurable performance must remain central to any modernization effort. However, this bill contemplates significant structural changes, including a possible new program, conditional termination triggers, and alternative modernization strategies if benchmarks are not met. AMVETS has testified before this Committee several times that any such changes during an already fragile implementation period risk undermining continuity rather than strengthening it. We will not support any such effort.

Veterans cannot afford another reset. AMVETS maintains that the safer course is to allow the current rollout plan to proceed under close oversight while requiring the VA to fix what is not working, support existing sites, and protect veterans from further operational turbulence.

Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee Oversight Act of 2025

AMVETS also cannot support the Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee Oversight Act of 2025. While the bill is framed as a reorganization of advisory committee structures within the VA, we are concerned that it could dilute the voices of veterans whose perspectives require dedicated attention, including women veterans, minority veterans, tribal veterans, veterans from outlying areas, and other historically underserved communities.

Dedicated advisory committees exist for a reason. They ensure that the concerns of these populations are not absorbed into broader discussions where they may receive less sustained attention. AMVETS is especially concerned about terminating long-standing committees, including the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, and replacing them with more consolidated entities that may reduce specialization and compress priorities rather than strengthen representation.

As the nation's most inclusive Congressionally-chartered veteran service organization, AMVETS believes the VA must preserve clear, direct, and durable channels for underrepresented veterans to be heard. Advisory committees are not bureaucratic excess when they serve as formal mechanisms for accountability and inclusion. For these reasons, AMVETS cannot support this legislation and believes Congress should strengthen, not weaken, dedicated representation for underserved veterans.

IV. CONCLUSION

AMVETS supports measures that expand access to care and benefits, improve oversight, protect veterans from fraud and exploitation, strengthen research and implementation, and ensure that vulnerable or underserved populations are not left behind. At the same time, we remain cautious of proposals that may create unintended harm, weaken representation, or introduce instability into systems that veterans rely on every day.

We appreciate the Committee's attention to these issues and remain committed to working with Members on both sides of the aisle to refine and advance policies that strengthen trust in the system and improve outcomes for veterans, survivors, and their families. Thank you.

National Commander, Paul Shipley

National Commander Paul Shipley was elected to the organization's highest office by his peers in August 2025 at the AMVETS National Convention in Greensboro, North Carolina. Commander Shipley is a U.S. Army Combat Veteran, having served from 2004 to 2014. He served in Iraq from 2006 to 2007 and was awarded the Combat Action Badge, Army Commendation Medal, and Iraq Campaign Medal. He lives in Uniontown, PA, with his wife and three daughters.

About AMVETS

AMVETS is the most inclusive congressionally chartered veterans service organization in the United States. Our membership is open to all active-duty service members, reservists, guardsmen, and honorably discharged veterans. As a result, AMVETS members have played a vital role in defending our nation in every conflict since World War II.

Our dedication to these men and women dates back to the post-World War II era, when countless returning service members sought access to the health, education, and employment benefits they had earned. Navigating the government bureaucracy to secure these benefits proved challenging for many, prompting experienced veterans to form local groups to assist their peers. As the veteran population surged into the millions, it became evident that a national organization was needed—one distinct from groups that had been established to serve veterans of previous wars. The emerging generation of veterans sought an organization of their own.

With this vision in mind, 18 delegates from nine veterans' clubs convened in Kansas City, Missouri, on December 10, 1944, to establish The American Veterans of World War II. Less than three years later, on July 23, 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed Public Law 216, officially recognizing AMVETS as the first congressionally chartered organization for post-World War II veterans.

Over the years, our congressional charter has been updated to welcome veterans from subsequent conflicts. AMVETS has also evolved to better meet the needs of newer generations of veterans and their families. To further this mission, we maintain partnerships with other congressionally chartered veterans' organizations as part of the "Big Six" coalition. Additionally, we collaborate with newer groups such as Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and The Independence Fund. Our commitment to veterans' well-being is further demonstrated through our partnership with the VA's Office of Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, working to combat the tragic epidemic of veteran suicide.

As AMVETS looks toward the future, we remain steadfast in our dedication to serving those who have defended our nation. We urge the 119th Congress to join us in this commitment by making policy decisions and casting votes that protect and support our veterans.