FOVA
FRIENDS OF VA MEDICAL CARE AND HEALTH RESEARCH

Statement for the Record Submitted by
The Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research
to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee
United States House of Representatives

Legislative Hearing on H.R.6583, the "Research Reform Act of 2025"
May 20, 2026

The Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA) submit this statement urging the House Veterans' Affairs Committee to carefully evaluate provisions of the VA Research Reform Act that would significantly restructure the VA research enterprise FOVA is a coalition representing nearly 150 national academic, medical, and scientific societies; voluntary health and patient advocacy groups; and veteran-focused associations. For more than 35 years, FOVA has worked to ensure that America's veterans receive high-quality health care through strong support of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) intramural research program.

Since the years following World War II, VA research has operated through a partnership model that brings together VA medical centers, academic affiliates, nonprofit research corporations, and external collaborators. This collaborative framework has supported the VA research enterprise for decades and remains central to the program's ability to translate scientific discovery into improved care for veterans. VA research is widely recognized as one of the most effective federal research enterprises. It supports thousands of active research projects annually, engages VA medical centers across the country, and has contributed to major medical advances including the first implantable cardiac pacemaker, the nicotine patch, and foundational work that enabled today's GLP-1 therapies. It is also home to the Million Veteran Program, one of the largest genomic databases in the world and a valuable tool in unlocking the future of medicine.

FOVA supports efforts to modernize VA research operations, reduce unnecessary administrative barriers, and ensure accountability to veterans and Congress. However, several provisions of the VA Research Reform Act would centralize authority in ways that threaten the partnerships, infrastructure, and scientific culture that makes VA research work. The Committee must weigh these risks carefully before advancing the legislation.

The VA research enterprise is not structured as a single federal laboratory system. Rather, it functions as a hybrid research ecosystem built on partnerships between VA medical centers, academic institutions, nonprofit research corporations, and external collaborators. These partnerships help manage research funding, compliance, contracting, philanthropy, and industry engagement. Several provisions in this bill would shift governance toward a centralized model that this ecosystem was not designed to support. FOVA urges the Committee to address these concerns directly.

Key Concerns:

1. Centralization That Undermines a Co-Existential System

The legislation repeatedly substitutes centralized control for locally driven, partnership-based operations. This approach is misaligned with the structure of VA research and introduces new risks without resolving the underlying challenges it seeks to address. The proposed centralized research data system, for example, would require detailed reporting on all research activities, including funding sources and collaborations. In practice, VA research depends heavily on non-VA funding streams, including industry-sponsored trials and philanthropic contributions administered through its affiliated partners. These relationships rely on strict confidentiality and contractual protection. The bill does not provide sufficient safeguards for this information, creating a real risk of exposing sensitive data and discouraging future external investments.

Similarly, the bill grants the Office of Research and Development (ORD) authority to intervene in or override local research review processes if timelines are not met. This provision directly weakens local institutional review boards (IRBs), which are essential to maintaining ethical oversight and regulatory compliance. Delays in study activation are a legitimate concern, but they stem from resource constraints and bureaucratic complexity rather than from a lack of centralized authority.

2. Unreliable Metrics and Mandates

H.R. 6583 imposes rigid mandates that risk distorting VA research priorities and undermining the system's effectiveness. By requiring public benchmarking across facilities without accounting for differences in size, geography, or patient populations, the bill would unfairly disadvantage smaller and rural sites while incentivizing volume over meaningful scientific and clinical impact. Its directive to set aside funding for implementation further disrupts the VA's historically balanced research portfolio, potentially diverting resources away from investigator-driven discovery and pushing innovation toward foreign markets. Additionally, requiring "veteran impact forecasts" at the proposal stage reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how research progresses, favoring low-risk to human health science over exigence for outcomes.

3. Duplication, Not Improvement

The bill's proposal to establish regional research hubs exemplifies a broader issue by creating new structures that duplicate existing capabilities rather than strengthening them. Many of the functions envisioned for these hubs are already performed through longstanding partnerships among VA medical centers, academic affiliates, and VA-affiliated nonprofits established by Congress. Introducing an additional administrative layer without new resources will increase bureaucracy and create new confusion in roles and responsibilities. Creating parallel structures

that replace or duplicate existing systems undermines the VA research ecosystem and the 3000+ studies this system currently administers.

4. Data Sharing Without Safeguards

The bill also expands VA's authority to share research data broadly, including data originating from external partners. While data sharing can accelerate discovery, the legislation does not establish clear protections for data ownership, consent, or partner agreements. Data generated through academic, nonprofit, and industry collaborations is often governed by strict agreements and expanding data sharing without explicit safeguards will critically undermine study efficacy and potentially expose sensitive information.

Conclusion

The VA research enterprise does not require wholesale restructuring, but rather an investment towards modernization that enhances what already works.

Congress can strengthen VA research by:

- Reducing bureaucratic burden within existing processes
- Investing in workforce capacity, including IRB staffing and research support personnel
- Modernizing existing data systems with appropriate protection for partners
- Supporting both discovery and implementation through balanced funding strategies
- Strengthening existing partnerships that enable VA research to operate effectively

VA research is a proven, high-performing system that over the past 100 years has delivered real results for veterans and the nation. Its strength lies in its flexibility, partnerships, and decentralized structure. H.R. 6583 moves in the opposite direction and increases unnecessary bureaucratic burden that may end up creating a slower process, weaken partnerships, and reduce the system's overall effectiveness.

FOVA stands ready to work with the Committee to develop reforms that strengthen the VA research enterprise while preserving the model that has made it one of the most successful research programs in the federal government.

Sincerely,

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