

Testimony of Representative Jeff Denham – House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health

March 27, 2014

Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of my legislation, H.R. 4198, the Appropriate Care for Disabled Veterans Act. I am pleased that this legislation has the support of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans and look forward to working with these groups further as we move this important bill through the legislative process.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, the number of disabled veterans has been increasing at an alarming rate. The number of severely disabled veterans is increasing even more quickly. These severely disabled veterans are suffering from a range of issues – spinal cord injury/dysfunction (SCI/D); blindness; traumatic brain injury (TBI); or mental health disorders. Many require prosthetic, orthotic and sensory aids, and all need specialized care in their communities. It is the responsibility of this committee to ensure that the VA is meeting that mission requirement.

To ensure that veterans had the care they needed, Congress mandated, beginning in 1996, that the VA maintain its capacity for the specialized treatment and rehabilitative needs of disabled veterans based on a number of specific measurements. For spinal cord injuries in particular, this capacity was to be measured by the number of staffed beds and the number of full-time employee equivalents available to provide care. The VA was also required to report this information to Congress after it was reviewed by the VA's Office of the Inspector General.

Unfortunately this reporting requirement has lapsed and consequently so has the VA's adherence to the capacity standards required by Congress. As an example, Paralyzed Veterans of America's testimony explains how issues involving VA's capacity such as staffing directly impacts daily bed censuses and thus, creates access issues for veterans who need comprehensive care.

With this bill, we have the opportunity to restore and modernize that reporting requirement so that this committee and our partners in the VSO community maintain a thorough understanding of the VA's ability to provide specialized care across the Veterans Health Administration system.

To that end I welcome the testimony provided today by Disabled American Veterans which points out how substantial changes in the way the VA provides care in such areas as substance abuse disorders, long-term nursing care and prosthetics require new capacity measurements not based on standards set in 1996.

The American people have provided extraordinary resources to the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is our job to provide oversight of those resources. We cannot provide the oversight necessary without accurate information.

Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley, thank you again for the opportunity to speak on behalf of this legislation.