

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
OF
PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA
PROVIDED TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
CONCERNING PENDING LEGISLATION

NOVEMBER 19, 2014

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Michaud, and members of the Committee, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on the broad array of pending legislation impacting the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that is before the Committee. No group of veterans understand the full scope of care provided by the VA better than PVA's members – veterans who have incurred a spinal cord injury or dysfunction. PVA members are the highest percentage of users among the veteran population,

and the most vulnerable when access to health care and other challenges impact quality of care. These important bills will help ensure that veterans receive timely, quality health care and benefits services.

H.R. 4720, “Medal of Honor Priority Care Act”

PVA supports H.R. 4720, to amend title 38 of the United States Code to move Medal of Honor recipients from priority group three to group one for enrollment in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system. Currently, under Section 1705(a)(3), Medal of Honor awardees are listed in priority group three. As our most revered and decorated veterans, awarded for valor in action against an enemy of the United States, they deserve nothing less than to be granted rapid access to hospital care and the highest possible quality medical services.

H.R. 4887, the “Expanding Care for Veterans Act”

PVA supports the “Expanding Care for Veterans Act” to further the research and delivery of complementary and alternative medicine to veterans. This legislation would direct the Veterans Administration (VA) to research the effectiveness of integrating alternative medicine into the health care services currently offered to veterans. VA would then educate and train current medical staff on the new practices at VA medical centers. Consultations would be held with key stakeholders and medical experts in order to identify the best practices to offer. Studies would be conducted to determine the greatest barriers to integration and coordination of care. The last provision of H.R. 4887 would establish a program on the use of wellness programs as complementary approach to mental health care for veterans and their families eligible under section 1712A(a)(1)(C) of title 38, United States Code. VA Secretary would award grants to

private or public nonprofit entities to assess the feasibility of using such a program. PVA fully supports the use of complementary and alternative medicine and believes such care options will give veterans with catastrophic injuries and disabilities additional options for pain management and rehabilitative therapies.

H.R. 4977, “Creating Options for Veterans Expedited Recovery Act”

PVA generally supports H.R. 4977, “Creating Options for Veterans Expedited Recovery Act”. This legislation would establish a commission to examine VA’s current mental health therapy model and the potential benefits of incorporating complementary alternative therapies. The bill aims to fill in the needs gaps for those who are not effectively served by traditional, evidence-based treatment plans. PVA believes that effective medical care, traditional or alternative, ought to be readily available to a veteran in need. Therapies for the commission to evaluate range from outdoor sports therapy, to accelerated resolution therapy, to service dog therapy. These options fall outside the VA’s typical services. It is PVA’s position that all VA mental health care should meet the specific, individual need of the veteran seeking medical services on a consistent basis. Complementary and alternative medicine give veterans with mental illness, as well as catastrophic disabilities, additional treatment options. This commission could offer an opportunity to identify additional “best practices” across medical disciplines.

H.R. 5059, “Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act”

PVA supports H.R. 5059, the “Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act”. If enacted, this legislation would increase access to and quality of mental health services while amplifying the staffing capacity to meet demand. Given the serious shortage of military mental

health professionals, the proposed student loan pilot program could help to garner quality and dedicated staff within the Veterans Administration (VA). As most of today's graduates enter the workforce with educational debt, this program could attract the highest caliber of new graduates to provide quality care to veterans, and remain competitive with private sector employers in the health care industry. Additionally, this legislation would mandate VA and the Department of Defense (DOD) coordinate the transfer of care from each agency in such a way that maintains the integrity and continuity of the treatment being received. H.R. 5059 would require a yearly evaluation, conducted by a third party, of the DOD and VA and their suicide prevention practices and programs. With an estimated 22 veteran suicides committed each day, this legislation is a step toward addressing the systemic issues that impede the delivery of timely, quality mental health care from the VA and DOD.

H.R. 5475, "The Newborn Care Improvement Act"

PVA supports H.R. 5475, a bill to amend Section 1786 of title 38, United States Code, to authorize hospital stays of up to 14 days for newborns under VA care. The current provision allows for a maximum stay of seven days. As the average hospital stay for a healthy newborn is two days, H.R. 5475 would provide enormous relief for families facing complications immediately after birth or severe infant illness.

H.R. 5484, "the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2014"

While PVA understands the intent of this legislation, we have serious concerns about H.R. 5484, "Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2014". First, the bill would require the Veterans Administration (VA) Secretary to select one VA medical center to serve as the National Center

for research on the treatment of health conditions of descendants of individuals exposed to toxic substances while serving in the Armed Forces. We appreciate that this bill recognizes the importance of understanding the long-lasting effects of toxic exposure. However, we are unconvinced that this responsibility rests with VA. The research and treatment of toxic exposure could be better carried out by a public health agency with a broader health care focus, such as the Department of Health and Human Services or National Institute of Health, with the direct support of the Department of Defense.

We have further concerns about the establishment of an Advisory Board for the National Center to determine links to health conditions for the purpose of adjudicating a claim for VA compensation and healthcare benefits. The proposed involvement of the Advisory Board in the adjudication processes could cause serious conflict with an already complicated claims process for veterans and their families. These complications would only be exacerbated should the Advisory Board's findings differ with the VA. This bill does not address the resolution of such an unwelcome scenario.

PVA would once again like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit our views on the legislation considered today. Enactment of much of the proposed legislation will significantly enhance the health care services available to veterans, service members, and their families. We would be happy to answer any questions that you may have for the record.

Information Required by Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding federal grants and contracts.

Fiscal Year 2013

National Council on Disability — Contract for Services — \$35,000.

Fiscal Year 2012

No federal grants or contracts received.

Fiscal Year 2011

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program— \$262,787.