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WRITTEN STATEMENT

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TO THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
U.S. HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

ON

H.R. 2460

APRIL 20, 2016

Dear Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on proposed legislation to improve Veterans' access to health care and other benefits administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Easter Seals especially applauds the Subcommittee's focus on adult day health care (ADHC) and how this community-based service can improve a Veteran's health and well-being while also meeting the Veteran's goal of remaining at home and in their community.

Easter Seals is changing the way the world defines and views disabilities by making profound, positive differences in people's lives every day. Through a network of 74-community-based affiliates, Easter Seals is a leading nonprofit provider that assists Veterans, military families, and others to reach their potential and succeed in their communities by providing and connecting them to local services and supports. Founded in 1919, Easter Seals began serving Veterans after World War II to help address the unmet needs of service members returning home with service-connected disabilities. Through our national network and Easter Seals Dixon Center for Military and Veterans Services, Easter Seals

continues to fill the gap between the services Veterans need and the services currently available through government or other entities. Adult day health care is one of the community-based services that Easter Seals offers through more than 50 programs in 14 states. Through the program, Easter Seals affiliates offer a menu of person-directed care and social and recreational activities to older adults, including Veterans, and individuals with disabilities. Easter Seals partners with the VA at the local level and nationally as the contractor to develop and administer the National Veteran Caregiver Training Program, which falls under the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee. Easter Seals is proud of its record and service for and on behalf of America's Veterans and their families.

It is because of our long-term care expertise and Veterans' experience that we lend our support for the twin goals behind H.R. 2460: to expand local adult day health care options for eligible Veterans and to ensure the VA's reimbursement rate better reflects the true cost and Veteran need of skilled adult day health care.

Expansion of Local Adult Day Health Care Options:

The VA described ADHC as “a key component in the continuum of long-term care” that helps Veterans remain in their homes and provides needed care in the “least restrictive environment that is safe for Veterans.”¹ The VA also noted that non-institutional extended care programs, such as adult day health care, have resulted in substantial reductions in nursing home placement, facilitates greater independence, and promotes enhanced quality of life for Veterans receiving the service.² With the passage of the Veterans Millennium Healthcare and Benefits Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-117), Congress recognized the importance of adult day services for Veterans and authorized the VA to furnish ADHC to Veterans who would otherwise require nursing home care. The VA can provide ADHS directly or by contracting with State Veterans Homes or community organizations “through non-VA care mechanisms such as sharing agreements, national or local contracts, and individual authorizations to the extent that the Veteran is eligible.” Some Easter Seals affiliates currently contract with the VA to provide ADHC for Veterans living in their communities.

H.R. 2460 would expand community-based options by directing the VA Secretary to partner with State Veteran Homes in each state to pay for adult day health care for a Veteran eligible for, but not receiving, nursing home care. While the VA is currently authorized to pay for ADHC at State Veterans Homes (SVH), only two of the 153 SVH currently offer ADHC at its facilities.³ Easter Seals supports efforts to expand long-term care options, including adult day health care, for eligible Veterans. Easter Seals believes the most effective approach in meeting the needs of eligible Veterans is to utilize the existing

¹ *Adult Day Health Care, VHA Handbook 1141.03, September 29, 2009,* http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2086

² *Uniform Geriatrics and Extended Care Services in VA Medical Centers and Clinics, VHA Handbook 1140.11, November 4, 2015,* http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=2086

³ *Caring for our Disabled Veterans Op-ed, Congressman Lee Zeldin, April 4, 2016,* <https://zeldin.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/caring-our-disabled-veterans-fight-expand-adult-day-care>

national network of more than 5,000 community-based adult day centers,⁴ which can include new and existing State Veteran Homes. This recommendation also recognizes the limited coverage of the 153 State Veteran Homes. Fourteen states, including large geographic states such as North Dakota and Alaska, are served by a single SVH.⁵ Expansion of ADHC in State Veteran Homes alone would not meet the needs of all eligible Veterans in a state. For example, there is a SVH in Marquette, Michigan, which is located in the Chairman's 1st Congressional District. However, the Marquette SVH is more than 4 hours from Alpena, Michigan, also in the Chairman's District. Michigan's only other SVH is located in Grand Rapids, also several hours away from Alpena. So while SVH expansion would benefit some Veterans it would not make sense for all eligible Veterans looking for ADHC.

Easter Seals Recommendation: As H.R. 2460 advances, Easter Seals encourages the Subcommittee to add “*or eligible non-Department extended care providers*” after every “*State home*” reference in the bill to ensure that other non-VA providers are included in the bill's other improvements.

Support for Adult Day Health Care Reimbursement That Reflects Costs:

Easter Seals fully supports H.R. 2460's effort to ensure that the VA's reimbursement rate for ADHC better reflects the true costs associated with providing this highly skilled service. Specialized adult day health care available through community providers could cost approximately \$90 per day or more, which is significantly less than the estimated \$250 per day associated with nursing home care. Current VA reimbursement for ADHC is under \$75 per day, which does not meet current costs.

H.R. 2460 would tie the VA's adult day health care reimbursement rate to 65 percent of the payment the VA pays for State home nursing home care, a provision that Easter Seals strongly supports. In addition, the VA typically only authorizes up to two days of adult day health care despite the fact that some Veterans require additional care. For example, Easter Seals Serving DC | MD | VA provides adult day health care for about 30 Veterans through its Baltimore program. Some of the Baltimore-area Veterans that are covered through the VA's ADHC program require more than the two days that the VA currently covers. These Veterans are paying out-of-pocket for the remaining days.

Easter Seals Recommendation: Easter Seals applauds efforts to more accurately reflect the cost of adult day health care and urges the Subcommittee to maintain the 65 percent rate provision. In addition, Easter Seals asks the Subcommittee to include report language urging the VA to increase the number of days a Veteran can receive VA-reimbursed ADHC, as long as the Veteran requires the additional care and is already eligible for the more comprehensive nursing home care.

⁴ National Adult Day Services Association, Research, <http://www.nadsa.org/research/>

⁵ National Association of State Veteran Homes, Directory of State Homes, <http://www.nasvh.org/StateHomes/statedir.cfm>

Adult day health care is a critical long-term, extended care support that should be available to all eligible Veterans, no matter where they live. H.R. 2460 makes significant improvements to the provision of ADHC service at the VA. Easter Seals urges the Subcommittee to advance this important legislation with our recommended changes to ensure Veterans can maintain their health and independence by staying in their home and community through adult day health care.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Easter Seals' views with the Subcommittee.