



**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA**

**On**

**Pending Legislation**

**115<sup>th</sup> Congress**

**HOUSE HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE on VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**June 13, 2018**

**CHAIRMAN DUNN, RANKING MEMBER BROWNLEY,** and Members of the Subcommittee on Health, the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is pleased to submit its views on pending legislation under consideration.

MOAA does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On behalf of the 350,000 members of the Military Officers Association of America, the largest military service organization representing the seven uniformed services, including active duty and Guard and Reserve members, retirees, veterans, and survivors and their families, thank you for your commitment and enduring support of our nation's servicemembers, veterans and their families.

MOAA offers our position on the following bills.

- **H.R. 2787, *Veterans-Specific Education for Tomorrow's Medical Doctors Act***
- **H.R. 3696, *Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act***
- **H.R. 5693, *Long-Term Care Veterans Choice Act***
- **H.R. 5864, *VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act***
- **DRAFT Bill, *Veterans Serving Veterans Act***

MOAA takes no position on: H.R. 5521, *VA Hiring Enhancement Act*; H.R. 5974, *VA COST SAVINGS Enhancement Act*; and, the draft bill *To Improve the Productivity and Management of VA Health Care Facilities*. These bills are outside of our scope of expertise.

#### **PENDING LEGISLATION**

**H.R. 2787, *Veterans-Specific Education for Tomorrow's Medical Doctors Act (VET MD Act)*.** MOAA supports this legislation. However, we urge Congress to commit the necessary resources and funding to execute the program.

The VET MD Act would allow the VA to establish a pilot program instituting a clinical observation program for pre-med students preparing to attend medical school.

The association is grateful to Representatives Kaptur, Jones, and Ryan for introducing the bill and for the subcommittee's consideration of this important piece of legislation. Like lawmakers, MOAA is eager for the VA to try new and innovative approaches growing the agency's medical workforce and eliminating the current 30,000-plus vacancies across its health care system. This legislation would introduce prospective medical students to the kinds of health care conditions common to the veteran population and help the VA encourage students to choose a career in medicine, particularly in occupational fields with high staffing shortages, such as women's health care and psychiatric care and/or consider a career in veterans' health care at the agency.

While the legislation only requires the VA to establish procedures to track students participating in the clinical observation program to determine if the student was accepted into medical school, MOAA recommends this subcommittee consider adding a provision requiring the VA to continue tracking these students through medical school and residency programs in an effort to secure medical professionals for VA employment and to ascertain the effectiveness of the clinical observation program to individuals deciding on a career in medicine who are interested in treating the veteran population.

**H.R. 3696, *Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act*.** MOAA supports this legislation and requests Congress provide the associated funding needed to support the legislative requirements of this bill.

The Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act would require the VA to award grants to establish or expand upon master's degree programs with academic medical institutions in the fields of orthotics and prosthetics. Further, the VA shall award a grant to an eligible institution to establish a Center of Excellence in Orthotic and Prosthetic Education to conduct evidence-based research and to improve health outcomes for veterans, servicemembers, and civilians.

The legislation also allows grants to eligible institutions planning to expand their existing master's degree program in these two fields by admitting more students or adding faculty to the program, expanding existing facilities, or by increasing cooperative partnerships with the VA and DoD.

Military service today has unique occupational demands and hazards. Servicemembers are required to carry heavy rucksacks and body armor in physically demanding training and harsh combat environments. Increased exposure to improvised explosive devices has resulted higher rates of injury among Post-9/11 troops, including amputations, and lower extremity conditions. Veterans are also presenting in increasing numbers for foot and ankle ailments, conditions complicated by diabetes, and neuropathy often associated with Agent Orange exposure, orthopedic, or vascular problems.

MOAA believes H.R. 3696 would provide the VA an additional tool it needs to address staffing shortages in the area of orthotics and prosthetics and help the agency attract high quality providers to meet current and future needs of veterans needing these important services within VA's integrated network of care.

**H.R. 5693, *Long-Term Care Veterans Choice Act*.** MOAA supports this bill as long as the requisite associated funding is provided for implementation.

The Long-Term Care Veterans Choice Act would authorize the VA to place veterans who are unable to live independently in private medical foster homes at the expense of the government.

Many veterans live with complex chronic diseases or disabling traumatic injuries and over time these individuals may be unable to live independently or their health care needs become such their family caregiver may no longer be able to manage their care. In recent years, the VA has established a medical foster home program to prevent this population of veterans being

institutionalized or delay entering nursing home care, instead allowing for them to be placed in a home in their community as a more acceptable alternative of care for the veteran. Veterans are placed in a home with other veterans and have a live-in qualified caregiver to support their medical needs 24/7.

While VA is required to provide institutional care, such as nursing home services to veterans who qualify for health care and have a service-connected disability rating of 70 percent or higher or are considered unemployable and have a disability rating of 60 percent or higher, the agency cannot directly pay for care through the medical foster home program. Veterans participating in the foster home program typically pay for these services from monthly VA disability compensation and Social Security payments and personal saving accounts.

VA recognizes the positive health outcomes and costs savings associated with veterans receiving care and services through the foster home program. This legislation would provide VA the mechanism to pay for the care directly so veterans and their families would not have to forfeit earned benefits to pay for care they would otherwise be entitled to if they were receiving institutionalized care.

**H.R. 5864, *VA Hospitals Establishing Leadership Performance Act.*** MOAA supports this legislation.

H.R. 5864 would require the VA to establish qualifications and standardized performance metrics for each human resources position within the veterans' health care system and submit a report to Congress on these qualifications and standards. The Comptroller General is required to follow up with a report on how the VA implemented the requirement to include an assessment of the quality of the qualifications and performance metrics adopted by the agency.

MOAA is pleased to see the legislation put forth to improve and strengthen VA's human resources system. Effective transformation will require leaders at all levels of the organization to be responsible and accountable for improving organizational health and staff engagement. Such transformation must include reforming and modernizing the VA's leadership and human capital management systems across the enterprise. While MOAA would like to see more comprehensive human resources strategy for system change along with the technology, resources, and funding to support the overhaul, H.R. 5864 is a foundational element to begin the massive overhaul needed to recruit, retain, and sustain a viable workforce. If we are to address the ongoing medical staffing shortages within the VA, then securing and sustaining high quality human resource professionals is essential.

**DRAFT Bill, *Veterans Serving Veterans Act.*** MOAA supports this legislation.

The *Veterans Serving Veterans Act* would permit the department to establish a database to capture specialties and skills of medical members of the Armed Forces to facilitate recruitment and address the occupational workforce needs of the VA.

The legislation would also require the department to establish and implement a training and certification program for veterans to work as medical technicians in VA.

The database, to be called the “Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs Recruitment Database,” is intended to be a single, searchable platform by which the two departments can exchange information on military occupational specialty or skills of consenting members of the Armed Forces who might be qualified after being discharged and released from active duty to fill medical vacancies in the VA. VA would be authorized to use direct hiring and appointment authorities and may authorize a relocation bonus to expedite hiring.

Just as H.R. 5864 listed above offers an opportunity to address critical workforce shortfalls, the *Veterans Serving Veterans Act* is equally important in identifying and securing critical medical professionals who may be qualified and interested in serving in the VA. MOAA has advocated for years for more collaboration and communications between DoD and VA as one of many ways to address VA’s critical professional and technical medical staffing shortages. MOAA is pleased to support this important legislation and is confident DoD and VA can implement the provisions in this bill with minimal cost to either department as the database should be considered a standard tool and requirement for use by human resources professionals.

MOAA thanks the subcommittee for considering these important pieces of legislation and we look forward to working with members of Congress in making the necessary changes listed above and to move the bills quickly through the Congress for final passage.