

Congressman Clay Higgins
Subcommittee on Health
House Veterans Affairs Committee
June 13, 2018

Mr. Chairman,

My bill, HR 5693, the Long Term Care Veterans Choice Act, authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for three years to cover the cost of long-term care at medical foster homes for up to 900 veterans otherwise eligible for nursing home care through the VA.

Medical Foster Homes (MFH) are private homes in which a caregiver provides services to a small group of individuals who are unable to live without day to day assistance, and are an alternative to nursing homes for those who require nursing home care but prefer a non-institutional setting with fewer residents. For many young veterans in need of round-the-clock-care, MFHs can provide a more age-appropriate, independent setting than traditional nursing homes.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has run its medical foster home initiative since 2000, and today the Veterans Health Administration oversees more than 700 licensed caregivers caring for nearly 1,000 veterans in 42 states. To be eligible to provide care to veterans, VA medical foster home providers must already pass a background check, complete 80 hours of initial training and 20 hours annually afterwards, and cannot work outside the home.

Unfortunately, while the VA will cover the cost of Home Based Primary Care for eligible veterans living in MFHs, the VA does not cover the cost of MFH living arrangements for veterans otherwise eligible for nursing home care through the VA. Instead, these veterans must pay for MFH services out of pocket or through private insurance. Costs associated with MFH services range between \$1500 - \$3000 a month, which is significantly lower than the nearly \$7,000 VA would otherwise pay per patient at a state VA nursing home.

In my home state of Louisiana, the VA operates state of the art Veterans Homes that provide residents a high quality of care in an understanding, supportive environment. Last summer I toured the Southwest Louisiana Veterans Home in Jennings and I can personally attest to the high quality of care and sense of well-being among veterans. But much like in the civilian world, there is no one-size-fits-all standard of care for veterans. Veterans should be afforded flexibility to use the benefits they righteously earned in a manner that best suits their individual needs.

HR 5693 gives much needed choice and personal agency back to these brave men and women who have selflessly sacrificed for our nation.

Thank you.