



July 10, 2021

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
Committee on Veterans Affairs
364 Cannon House Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chairman Takano,

On behalf of The Independence Fund, I am providing a statement for the record on the following bills to be considered by the Committee on July 14, 2021.

H.R. 913: The Independence Fund supports this legislation. The Independence Fund requests that the Committee to do all it can to expedite these approvals and seeks ways to provide the Department of Veterans Affairs with sufficient flexibility on leasing of new facilities to meet growing demand in certain localities.

H.R. 2587: The Independence Fund supports this legislation, in concept.

H.R. 2775: The Independence Fund supports this legislation.

H.R. 2797: The Independence Fund does not support this legislation, has serious concerns with what it proposes to accomplish, and questions the reasoning behind its purported utility and necessity. There is already a societal stigma relative to mental health in general and an unfortunate stereotyping of Veterans as victims who disproportionately suffer from mental health conditions and may be unstable or aggressive as a result. Placing missing Veterans in the same public alert category as missing children or the elderly will only further this stigma and stereotyping.

H.R. 3027: The Independence Fund does not support this legislation in part because the department of Veterans Affairs has been operating under authorities for expedited hiring based on Office of Personnel Management guidance during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Independence Fund recommends that these authorities be continued indefinitely or, at a minimum, be assessed by the Department for best practices that could be retained and made permanent.

H.R. 3674: The Independence Fund supports this legislation with a caveat. Additional Vet Centers will require additional mental health professionals and social workers and the United States has a shortage of those professionals. Constructing more Vet Centers without a robust pipeline of mental health professionals and social workers to staff them will not adequately address the mental health problems Veterans are facing in their communities.

H.R. 3693: The Independence Fund has no position on this legislation.

“VIPER Act” (discussion draft): The Independence Fund has no position on this legislation pending further review.

Legislation to clarify and improve the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (discussion draft): The Independence Fund supports this legislation, as drafted.

Legislation requiring an independent assessment of health care delivery systems and management processes in the Department of Veterans Affairs (discussion draft): The Independence Fund has no position on this legislation pending further review.

Legislation to furnish Vet Center counseling to Veterans and members of the Armed Forces using certain educational assistance benefits (discussion draft): The Independence Fund has no position on this legislation pending further review. Generally, The Independence Fund would not support legislation that expands the eligible population for Vet Center counseling because these Centers are currently experiencing a higher than normal demand for finite services due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and are, in some cases, contending with higher demand for counseling than their staffs can adequately manage.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Verardo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Verardo
CEO, The Independence Fund