

Congresswoman Dingell (MI-12) Statement for the Record
H.R. 4993 - Veterans Emergency Care Reimbursement Act of 2022
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health

Thank you, Chair Brownley and Ranking Member Bergman, for convening today's legislative hearing on a number of important bills to improve healthcare for our nation's veterans.

My husband was a veteran and we have a large veteran population across my district, so I deeply understand the importance of expanding access to quality healthcare that fully meets veterans' needs. Yet, too many veterans have been left on the hook to cover expenses for emergency care received outside of the VA.

In 2009, Congress passed legislation to allow the VA to reimburse veterans for emergency medical expenses incurred at non-VA facilities that were not covered by the veteran's private health insurance.

However, for over the last decade, the VA has refused to cover emergency care expenses if veterans have other health insurance, leaving insured veterans to cover deductibles and coinsurance expenses which can amount to thousands of dollars.

Two federal court cases have issued rulings that the VA should be reimbursing veterans for emergency care claims, and that it has been subverting congressional intent through its continued denials.

Yet, the VA has recently appealed the latest decision, continuing to undermine congressional intent and hurting veterans in the process.

I've spoken to a veteran in my district who was sent to the ER for an internal bleed. He was septic upon arrival, but thanks to the quick response by the emergency care team, he made a full medical recovery.

Despite this veteran taking the appropriate steps to receive reimbursement from the VA, the VA has not paid a dime toward his emergency medical care. This has forced this veteran to pay out of pocket for the outstanding expenses. As a result, his credit score is now completely decimated, and he is struggling to recover financially.

Before the Subcommittee today is important legislation I was proud to introduce that will solve this issue once and for all.

I appreciate the Committee's inclusion of H.R. 4993, the Veterans Emergency Care Reimbursement Act of 2021.

The legislation would simply require the VA to reimburse veterans for emergency medical claims from non-VA facilities that are not covered by a veteran's private insurance.

But this legislation is much more than that – it's a promise to veterans that they will be taken care of, regardless of where they received emergency care.

Veterans do not have the ability to predict when an emergency may strike, and we should never expect them to delay urgent care just so they can travel to their closest VA facility. For rural veterans, this could be hours away.

Veterans should be able to receive the emergency care they need at the closest emergency facility without worrying whether they'll be able to afford it.

With the Veterans Emergency Care Reimbursement Act, we can address this inexcusable issue head-on and ensure that those who put their lives on the line for us are receiving the proper support and care they deserve through the VA.

I would like to again thank Chair Brownley and Ranking Member Bergman for their leadership, as well as Senator Blumenthal who is leading this effort with me in the Senate. We look forward to continuing to work with this Committee to move the Veterans Emergency Care Reimbursement Act forward.

I urge all my colleagues to support this important legislation, which will ensure veterans receive the support they deserve.

Thank you and I yield back.