



April 3rd, 2023

The Honorable Mariannette Miller-Meeks
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
3460 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Julia Brownley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
2262 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Miller-Meeks and Ranking Member Brownley:

AARP, on behalf of our nearly 38 million members and all older Americans nationwide, appreciates the opportunity to submit a written statement for the record to the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for the legislative hearing concerning the "Elizabeth Dole Home and Community Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act of 2023." AARP supports passage of this important piece of bipartisan legislation to expand access to current VA programs that provide care at home, and thanks Representative Brownley (D-CA) and Representative Jack Bergman (R-MI) for their leadership.

Increasing Access to Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS) and Supporting the Direct Care Workforce

For most older adults, their strong preference is to receive care they may need as they age in their own homes and communities, rather than in a nursing home. In a [2021 AARP survey](#), three-fourths of adults age 50+ told us they wish to remain in their current homes and communities as long as possible. That's why AARP has made it a priority to ensure people age 50+ are able to find the care they and their family members need, when they want it and in the setting of their choice. AARP has long advocated at the federal and state level for enabling older adults to live in their homes and communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown the dangers too often faced by older Americans in institutional care. Greater investments in home- and community-based services will allow more veterans to age in their homes and communities, where they want to be, while alleviating some of the challenges facing our nation's State Veterans homes.

After their service, hard work, and contributions to our society, America's veterans deserve to live with independence, security, and dignity. AARP is fighting for individuals to have high-quality, affordable options when it comes to long-term care—especially care at home.

Investments in the workforce that provides these important services are also critical. Direct care workers provide the bulk of paid long-term care, but there is already a shortage of direct care workers that will only grow as the population ages. A shortage of skilled workers makes life difficult for individuals and families searching for quality care, and there is an urgent need to

develop an adequate workforce to care for older adults and provide long-term services and supports. AARP encourages Congress to take action to help attract and retain direct care workers through increased pay and benefits, paid leave, improved training, career pathways, and other job improvement initiatives. It will require bipartisan work at the local, state, and federal levels and in both the public and private sectors to make sure that our nation's veterans with service-connected disabilities have access to the quality, affordable supportive services and care they need.

Supporting Family Caregivers

Family caregivers—broadly defined as including relatives, partners, friends, or neighbors—are the backbone of the care system in this country, and there should be no discussion of caregiving or the care economy that leaves out the 48 million Americans who are providing care to loved ones. They help make it possible for older adults, people with disabilities, and veterans to live independently in their homes and communities. Family caregivers are all ages, races, and ethnicities and cut across all generations and segments of our population. This is physically, emotionally, and financially challenging work family members and others are providing, usually without pay.

[Family caregivers are providing about \\$600 billion annually in unpaid care to loved ones.](#) Each year, [\\$14 billion](#) in uncompensated care is provided by 5.5 million veteran and military caregivers. On this point, AARP wishes to be crystal clear: if families were not shouldering these caregiving responsibilities, taxpayers would be on the hook for much more costly nursing home care and unnecessary hospital stays.

Every day, family caregivers help loved ones with tasks such as eating, dressing, bathing, transportation, arranging, directing, and coordinating care among multiple providers and settings (including post-discharge), performing medical/nursing tasks such as wound care, managing multiple complex medications, managing finances, and paying for services to help their loved ones. [Six in ten family caregivers are women, four in ten caregivers represent diverse populations, and six in ten caregivers are working, either full- or part-time.](#)

Family caregivers often take on physical, emotional, and financial challenges. For example, military veteran caregivers consistently experience worse health outcomes, greater strains in family relationships, and more workplace problems than non-caregivers – with caregivers of pre-9/11 veterans being two times more at risk. Veteran and military caregiving respondents report higher levels of need for immediate financial assistance when compared to their non caregiving peers, according to research by Blue Star Families.

An [AARP report](#) found that family caregivers are spending, on average, 26 percent of their income on routine caregiving expenses annually, or \$7,242 every year. Hispanic/Latino and African American caregivers also reported greater financial strain than White or Asian American caregivers. Hispanic/Latino caregivers spent, on average, 47% of their household income on caregiving, and expenses for African American caregivers totaled, on average, 34% of income.

H.R. 542, “The Elizabeth Dole Home and Community-Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act of 2023.”

AARP supports the passage of the “Elizabeth Dole Home and Community-Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act of 2023” introduced by Representative Julia Brownley (D-CA) and Representative Jack Bergman (R-MI). This important piece of legislation expands access to current VA programs that provide care at home through coordination with Medicare’s well-established and successful PACE program. The bill raises the expenditure limit for non-institutional care alternatives to match the reimbursement rate of nursing homes to better allow veterans who require complex and round-the-clock care to remain at home with their friends and loved ones. HCBS programs at the VA such as the Veteran Directed Care Program, the Home Health Aide Program, the Home-Based Primary Care Program, and the Skilled Home Health Care Program need more support in order to provide vital home-health care to our nation’s veterans, and this legislation helps shore up those critically important programs.

The bill will also improve transitions for veterans and their caregivers upon denial or discharge from the VA Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. The legislation would also create a central online resource to help families and veterans find information on available programs, increase access to respite care to give caregivers a temporary break from caregiving responsibilities, and review access to services, caregiver support, and other issues to lay the groundwork for further improvements.

AARP appreciates your efforts to better support our veterans, and their caregivers, to get the care and support they need to remain in their homes. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or have your staff contact Emily Hetherington on our Government Affairs team at ehetherington@aarp.org.

Sincerely,



Bill Sweeney
Senior Vice President
Government Affairs