


Statement for the Record
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
H.R. 5530 Veterans Emergency Transportation
Access Act of 2024
Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Health
March 21, 2024



Presented by
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Chairwoman Miller-Meeks, Ranking Member Brownley, and members of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV) strongly supports and calls for the enactment of H.R. 5530, *The Veterans Emergency Transportation Access Act*. JWV thanks Chairman Bost for introducing the bill on September 18, 2023.

H.R. 5530 is a commonsense bipartisan approach that, if passed, would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct a rigorous review process and consult with stakeholders in a meaningful way before proceeding with any reimbursement changes. JWV encourages the Committee and Congress to pass H.R. 5530 to ensure veterans have access to lifesaving air and ground ambulance transport.

Background


VA Final Rule Cuts Emergency Medical Air Transportation Reimbursement Rates Putting Veterans at Risk

JWV has led the fight in the Veteran Service Organization (VSO) community on VA's proposed rule (RIN 2900-AP89, Change in Rates VA Pays for Special Modes of Transportation) that cuts the VA reimbursement rate for emergency air medical services to below the costs of the services themselves. As published, it would put more than 2.7 million rural veterans in our country who are enrolled in the VHA, and 4.8 million rural veterans overall, at risk of losing life-saving emergency air transportation.

When VA published the final rule on February 16, 2023, they made no changes but did delay the effective date to February 16, 2024. The final rule would cause emergency air medical bases around the country to shut their doors, halting services to veterans. On December 29, VA published in the Federal Register a delay in the effective date to February 16, 2025, due to tremendous pressure from Congress and the VSO community. JWV appreciates the delay but remains concerned about the continued misunderstanding by the VA of how many Veterans receive emergency air medical care to and from non-VA facilities.

JWV is pleased that the FY2024 MILCON/VA Appropriations Act included language confirming; *the Departments actions to postpone the final effective date for reimbursement rates for ground and air ambulance services. Before modifying these rates in accordance with the new timeline, the Department is directed to communicate directly with service providers to fully understand the impact of the proposed rule change on veterans. Further, the Department should identify staff dedicated to facilitating contracting with providers of these services at fair and appropriate reimbursement rates, to include providing technical assistance on the contracting process, and to provide support for entities who are beginning the contracting process for the first time. The agreement directs the Department to report back to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress no later than 90 days after enactment of this Act on the feedback received from industry stakeholders and its plan for ensuring zero harm to veterans.*

JWV applauds Committee leadership for their support in getting this included in the Appropriations Act.



Passing H.R. 5530, *The Veterans Emergency Transportation Access Act*, will codify the FY 2024 MILCON/VA Appropriations Act requirements. JWV looks forward to working together to hold VA accountable and seek alternative workable solutions before the final rule becomes effective on February 16, 2025.

JWV thanks the subcommittee for the opportunity to submit this statement in support of H.R. 5530. JWV also appreciates the open dialogue available with the members of Subcommittee on Health as well as the support of the hard-working committee staff on both sides of the aisle.

About the Jewish War Veterans of the USA

The Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV) was founded in 1896 and was Congressionally chartered August 21, 1984. JWV advocates for all veterans regardless of their religion, heritage, or period of service. JWV is the longest serving Veterans Service Organization (VSO) in the country and celebrated its 128th anniversary on March 15, 2024. JWV's mission message is strong and clear: fighting for military and veterans benefits and services; advocating on their behalf with Congressional officials, Executive Branch departments and the White House; and continuing to combat antisemitism, bigotry and hate wherever and whenever it occurs.



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***JWV is A Jewish Voice for Veterans and
a Veteran's Voice for Jews***