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**Testimony of David A. Coker, President, Fisher House Foundation
Before the: Health Subcommittee for House Veterans Affairs Committee
In support of the Fisher House Availability Act of 2025**

Thank you, Chairwoman Miller-Meeks, and good afternoon to the members of the Committee.

My name is David Coker, and I have the privilege of serving as President of Fisher House Foundation.

The Fisher House program was founded in 1990 by Zachary Fisher, a private citizen and patriotic philanthropist who believed that no military family should ever struggle to be by their loved one's side during a medical crisis. He built the first Fisher Houses at the National Naval Medical Center and Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The vision was simple but powerful: to create a home away from home for families traveling to be with a loved one receiving care.

The Fisher House program has now grown into a network of 100 Fisher Houses located at Department of Defense hospitals and VA medical centers across the country and overseas. Because of the special mission of supporting both military and veteran families, it is fitting that the 100th Fisher House, to be dedicated next month, is located at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center—the only fully integrated DoD and VA medical center in the country.

Each home is now built through the generous support of the American public and donated to the VA or the military service it serves. To date, Fisher Houses have offered more than 12 million nights of lodging and saved families more than \$650 million in out-of-pocket costs.

When we gift a Fisher House to the Army, Navy, Air Force, or VA, our goal is to support families in their time of greatest need. We know that having a loved one present improves recovery. Family members serve as caregivers, advocates, and a tremendous source of strength. We believe they are essential to the healing process—and that every veteran and service member deserves to have their loved one at their side.

Of the 100 Fisher Houses, more than half support VA medical centers. In 2024, VA Fisher Houses served more than 24,000 veteran families—spanning all eras and every generation.

Last fall, guidance was published which changed the way VA houses operate. It directed that only families of veterans receiving VA-directed care were eligible for the support Fisher Houses provide. Even when rooms are available, families that have historically been welcomed must now be turned away.

“Dedicated to our greatest national treasure... our military service men and women, and their loved ones”



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Last year, the occupancy rate at VA Fisher Houses across the country was 53%. We would ask if a room was available; consideration should be given to support the family of an eligible DoD beneficiary.

The Fisher House supporting the Washington DC VA Medical Center is on the same campus as the Children's National Hospital, the National Rehabilitation Hospital, and Washington Hospital Center. Last year, occupancy at that house was 22% and could easily accommodate families receiving care at one of the other hospitals.

The world-renowned Paley Orthopedic and Spine Institute is located near the Fisher House supporting the Thomas H. Corey VA Medical Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. 27 military children were referred to them for life-changing care last year, but today their families are no longer eligible to stay in the Fisher House.

There are three Fisher Houses at the DeBakey VA Medical Center in Houston, Texas adjacent to the Texas Medical Center and MD Anderson. Last year, the occupancy rate was 63%, and again, because of this guidance, military families will be turned away.

The bipartisan Fisher House Availability Act of 2025 would restore the flexibility that VA Fisher House managers once had, allowing families of active-duty service members and other eligible beneficiaries to stay on a space-available basis, while preserving the priority access for veterans.

This change will not reduce access for veterans. It simply allows these homes—already built, already staffed, already serving—to do what they were intended to do: keep families of our nation's heroes together in the hardest moments of their lives.

This bill is consistent with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the VA — Strengthening our Partnership in Service to those we Serve, and it will provide one more way for the two departments to work together to support both the military and the veteran communities.

On behalf of Fisher House Foundation and the tens of thousands of families we have the privilege of serving each year, I want to thank the sponsors of this bill and all of you for your support for our nation's service members, veterans, and their loved ones. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I welcome your questions.

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