



**Statement for the Record to the House Committee
on Veterans' Affairs Oversight & Investigation
Subcommittee**

Legislative Hearing

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President, American Association of Nurse
Anesthesiology
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Introduction

Chairwoman Kiggans, Ranking Member Mrvan, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to offer this statement for the record. The American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology (AANA) is the professional association for Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) and student registered nurse anesthetists, with membership that includes more than 61,000 CRNAs and student nurse anesthetists representing almost 90 percent of the nurse anesthetists in the United States. CRNAs are advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) who provide acute, chronic, and interventional pain management services. In some states, CRNAs are the sole anesthesia providers in nearly 100 percent of rural hospitals, affording these medical facilities obstetrical, surgical, trauma stabilization, and pain management capabilities.

The AANA applauds the subcommittee for holding a hearing on important legislation, including H.R. 6538, the *VA Correction Compensation Act*, as well as legislation to protect VA employees from retaliation, and to protect veterans from predatory scams. These are important issues that affect frontline healthcare providers and the veterans they serve.

H.R. 6538 – VA Correct Compensation Act

We appreciate Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano introducing H.R. 6538, the *VA Correct Compensation Act of 2023*. CRNAs and other nurses working in the VA are classified as Title 38 employees, and as such are subject to VA's overly expansive interpretation of its authority under 38 USC 7422. This interpretation means that CRNAs and other Title 38 employees have been prevented from remedying routine payroll errors through grievance procedures. This is an unfair and highly problematic practice, and we strongly support this bipartisan legislation to remedy it. We encourage the Committee to move this legislation forward this session.

The VA misuse of the 7422 exclusions to deny the efforts of Title 38 employees to ensure the accuracy of paychecks, including the correct calculation of overtime pay and various shift differentials, is particularly problematic for CRNAs and other healthcare providers who are often subject to overtime and other pay differentials. The issues surrounding pay have weakened employee morale and exacerbated longstanding problems recruiting and retaining VA medical professionals including CRNAs, who are already one of the more difficult providers to recruit. These issues are worsened by ongoing issues related to the aggregate pay limit for CRNAs that unfairly delays pay for overtime and shift differential to the following calendar year. Some CRNAs even hit the aggregate pay limit within the first few months of the calendar year. We urge VA to address the aggregate pay issue.

Retaliation Issues

The AANA also commends the Committee for reviewing legislation to ensure that VA employees are properly trained on a number of issues through H.R. 6531, *TRAIN VA Employees Act*. In particular, the AANA supports the legislative requirement that such training include a focus on "addressing reports of a hostile work environment, retaliation, or harassment of, or by, another supervisor or employee."

Unfortunately, many CRNAs working in the VA face retaliation and hostile work environments created by physician anesthesiologists. The AANA is aware of multiple reports of physician anesthesiologists retaliating against CRNAs who are engaged in research within the VA and who advocate for their profession outside of their VA employment. This is part of a culture of fear that, sadly, many CRNAs face within the VA in efforts to silence them and to protect physician interests. It is imperative the VA do more to protect their employees from retaliatory actions and hostile work environments. Creating a stable and positive working environment is critical to ensuring a robust healthcare workforce is available to care for our veterans.

We thank you for your time and attention to these important matters. If we can be of any help, please contact Matthew Thackston, AANA Director of Federal Government Affairs at mthackston@aana.com or (202) 741-9081.

Sincerely,

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

Dru Riddle, PhD, DNP, CRNA, FAAN
President
American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology (AANA)