

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS**



House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

Statement for the Record on H.R. 4601 Commitment to Veteran Support and

Outreach Act of 2021

October 20, 2021

Chairwoman Elaine Luria, Ranking Member Troy Nehls, and members of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, on behalf of the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) and our 1,766 members from local governmental offices from across the Nation, thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement regarding H.R. 4601 “Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act (CVSO Act)”.

NACVSO’s organizational mission is to aggressively pursue all benefits for veterans and eligible family members. Our membership is comprised of a variety of local governmental structures to include county, tribal, municipal, and state Veteran Service Officers. Local Governmental Veterans Service Officers (GVSOs) stepped in to provide and fund these services for veterans and their families to supplement gaps in VA support. To date, the VA is not positioned well enough within many communities to effectively help veterans obtain the benefits earned from their service. Local GVSOs can assist veterans and their families through cross-accreditation with the VA through NACVSO or other major Veteran Service Organizations that offer accreditation. Since GVSOs are accredited with multiple VSOs and their strategic community locations, they continue to be the first and only in-person contact for many veterans seeking VA benefits.

The frontline advocacy being performed by GVSOs requires ever-evolving adaptation, continual resources, and education. Local GVSOs must evolve to stay proficient in VA programs and service delivery methods to continue to meet the needs of the ever-changing veteran population. Meeting this need is challenging as local GVSOs rely solely on variable and often uncertain local government fiscal support. The complete reliance on local funding to provide services for veterans has led to disparities in the physical and technological resources available to assist veterans across the country. These resources can include adequate staffing to meet with and assist veterans accessing VHA care and VBA benefits. In 2020, Washington County, Minnesota had a veteran population of 13,968 supported by four full-time CVSOs that carried a total of 20 VA accreditations, compared with Harrison County, Mississippi which had 22,664 veterans and just one full-time CVSOs with two total VA accreditations. Ultimately, disparities in staffing can lead to preventable disparities in care for our veterans.

The CVSO Act would help to address these national disparities. Funding from the CVSO Act would assist GVSOs with remaining up to date with VA policy and legislative changes, attain VA accreditations and maintain with continual training, obtain updated technology such as computers and software programs that can better interface with VA systems, provide medical transportation, assist with benefits applications, facilitate BVA appeal hearings, perform outreach in rural and urban areas, and assist with VHA health care billing issues.

Chairwoman Luria, Ranking Member Nehls, and members of the Committee, on behalf of NACVSO and its members, we appreciate both the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding this matter, as well as your willingness to hold a hearing for the “Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act (CVSO Act)”. If the VA places a greater emphasis on working to increase communication, training, and resources to their local governmental partners, we can improve outcomes for veterans that seek the benefits and care they have earned – no matter where they live. Local and tribal governments have been investing in these services for decades. It is well past time for the federal government to support their local partners and make them force multipliers instead of independent operators.

Respectfully,



Nichole R. Coleman
NACVSO President



Michael L. McLaughlin
NACVSO Legislative Chair