
501(C)(3) Veterans Non-Profit

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

FOR THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

DISABILITY AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

ON

PENDING LEGISLATION

March 26, 2025

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member McGarvey, and members of the subcommittee, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on the pending legislation impacting the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that is being considered during today's hearing. No group of veterans understand the full scope of benefits and care provided by the VA better than PVA members—veterans who have incurred a spinal cord injury or disorder (SCI/D).

H.R. 530, the ACES Act

The results of many recent studies suggest that veterans who were aviators are diagnosed with cancer and die from it at rates significantly higher than the U.S. general population. PVA supports the ACES Act, which proposes a multi-year study conducted by the National Academy of Sciences-Engineering-Medicine (NASEM) to determine what causes elevated cancer rates among military aircrew members. Its goal is to better understand how cancer affects these individuals by identifying the types of hazardous exposures related to aircrew-related occupations that may contribute to cancer; attempting to establish links between these exposures and various types of cancers; and determining the prevalence of certain cancers, specifically among these aircrew members, and assessing mortality rates linked to these cancers. Once the study is completed, NASEM will be required to submit their findings to the VA and Congress.

H.R. 647, the Ensuring Veterans' Final Resting Place Act of 2025

Under current law, if a veteran's family chooses to have the VA furnish a commemorative plaque or urn for their loved one, they inadvertently forfeit their right to later inter the veteran at a national cemetery, which requires either a headstone or a marker at the grave site. PVA has no objections to this bill which allows surviving family members to have the veteran interred at a VA National Cemetery at a later date, as long as they cover the cost of the urn or plaque that was initially received from the VA.

H.R. 1039, the Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act

Testimony from veterans service organizations received by this subcommittee on March 20, 2024, revealed many problems with the language the VA uses in its letters to veterans regarding the status of their disability claims and appeals. In recent years, these letters have become lengthy tomes that require veterans to obtain help to interpret them. The Clear Communication for Veterans Claims Act directs the VA to enter into an agreement with a federally-funded research and development center for an assessment of notice letters that the department sends to claimants. PVA believes the VA should place greater emphasis on successfully communicating with the veteran, and focus less on legalese. Therefore, we appreciate and strongly support efforts like this to help demystify the VA claims process.

H.R. 1228, the Prioritizing Veterans' Survivors Act

VA's Office of Survivors Assistance (OSA) was established in 2008 (P.L. 110-389) to serve as a resource regarding all benefits and services furnished by the department to the survivors and dependents of deceased veterans and members of the Armed Forces. Congress also intended that OSA would serve as a principal advisor to the VA Secretary, and promote the use of VA benefits, programs, and services to survivors. In February 2021, the OSA was moved from the Office of the VA Secretary to the Veterans Benefits Administration's, Pension and Fiduciary Service, changing the span of control and altering a key role that Congress intended for the office. PVA supports this bill which seeks to realign the OSA back under the Office of the VA Secretary.

H.R. 1286, the Simplifying Forms for Veterans Claims Act

PVA supports this legislation, which seeks to simplify the VA claims process by requiring the department to contract with a federally funded research and development center to assess how to make the claims forms more user friendly. PVA believes that simplifying VA forms helps veterans to better understand the process and can help dissuade veterans from seeking outside, unaccredited help to pursue their VA claims and appeals.

H.R. 1344, the Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act

This legislation would authorize the National Cemetery Administration to provide a headstone, marker, or burial receptacle for an eligible spouse or dependent child buried in a national, state, or tribal cemetery regardless of the date of death. Currently, eligible dependents who passed before November 11, 1998, or after October 1, 2024, are ineligible to be so memorialized. This bill would also extend this authorization an additional 10 years past 2025. PVA has no objection to this bill.

H.R. 1578, the Veterans Claims Education Act of 2025

PVA supports this legislation, which would require the VA, upon receipt of a claim by an unrepresented veteran, to provide the information for accredited agents who could assist in the process going forward. Veterans who file a claim should not be victims of predators seeking to scam them out of their VA benefits. The VA should ensure that any veteran who files a claim be provided the contact information of accredited agents who can help them and answer their questions, steering them away from unaccredited agents.

H.R. 1741, the Veteran Appeals Transparency Act of 2025

PVA supports efforts like this bill to increase transparency of the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) process by publishing the docket dates for cases assigned to the Board members for decisions that week. By requiring the BVA to post the docket dates, it would give a veteran who currently has an appeal at the Board a better understanding of how the appeals are being adjudicated and increase overall transparency.

H.R. 2137, the Review Every Veterans Claim Act of 2025

PVA strongly supports this legislation, which seeks to limit the VA's authority to deny a veteran's claim solely based on the veteran's failure to appear for a medical examination associated with the claim. Thousands of veterans' claims for service connection, claims for increase, and for other benefits like Total Disability Individual Unemployability and Aid and Attendance have been denied solely on the basis of missing an examination. There are many legitimate reasons why a veteran may not be able to attend a scheduled exam. We are also aware of numerous instances where VA contractors erroneously record the veteran as a "no show." Veterans with SCI/D often encounter multiple barriers in travel when compared to other veterans and are apt to miss some of these appointments. We believe that passage of this legislation will ensure that a missed exam isn't the only basis for denying a veteran's claim. VA should also more carefully consider whether an examination is needed since many veterans with SCI/D already receive the majority of their care through the department's SCI/D centers whose records have adequate information to provide an accurate disability picture for the veteran.

H.R. 2138, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2025

PVA supports this legislation, which directs VA to increase amounts payable for disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving spouses and children. Specifically, VA would be required to raise compensation amounts by the same percentage as the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in benefits for Social Security recipients that is effective on December 1, 2025. These COLA increases maintain the purchasing power of VA's compensation amounts but we believe that programs such as DIC, Special Monthly Compensation, and other monetary benefits should be revisited to ensure that the amounts are adequate in addressing the needs for seriously disabled veterans and survivors.

Discussion draft, the Improving VA Training for Military Sexual Trauma Claims Act

PVA supports this draft legislation, which would require every VA employee who processes a claim related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST), or who engages in communications with an MST

claimant, to receive annual sensitivity training. Additionally, it would also require contracted providers who conduct compensation and pension exams to receive the training. The delicate nature of MST claims should be enough to recognize that each person involved in every step of the claims process should receive training to avoid revictimization of survivors and help to ensure that they are treated with care and dignity.

Discussion draft, the Board of Veterans' Appeals Attorney Retention and Backlog Reduction Act

This draft legislation would increase the cap for non-supervisory attorneys at the BVA to the GS-15 level on the federal pay scale. Currently, attorneys at the BVA can reach a maximum of GS-14. PVA supports this legislation as it would encourage retention of trained and experienced attorneys, reduce turnover, and help recruit top candidates. Recruiting and retaining high quality attorneys at the BVA should be a top priority for the VA to help reduce the backlog of appeals and ensure high quality decisions from the BVA.

Discussion draft, the Survivor Benefits Delivery Improvement Act of 2025

PVA supports this draft bill, which directs the VA to collect demographic data on veterans' survivors. We believe the change would help the department and Congress better understand the utilization of survivor-related benefits and services. It also directs the VA to develop an outreach program for survivors, similar to the Solid Start program, to make sure that every survivor knows what benefits are available to them.

PVA would once again like to thank the subcommittee for the opportunity to submit our views on the legislation being considered today. We look forward to working with you on this legislation and would be happy to take any questions for the record.

Information Required by Rule XI 2(g) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding federal grants and contracts.

Fiscal Year 2025

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events — Grant to support rehabilitation sports activities — \$502,000.

Fiscal Year 2023

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events — Grant to support rehabilitation sports activities — \$479,000.

Fiscal Year 2022

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events — Grant to support rehabilitation sports activities — \$ 437,745.

Disclosure of Foreign Payments

Paralyzed Veterans of America is largely supported by donations from the general public. However, in some very rare cases we receive direct donations from foreign nationals. In addition, we receive funding from corporations and foundations which in some cases are U.S. subsidiaries of non-U.S. companies.