



**STATEMENT OF
TRAGEDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR SURVIVORS (TAPS)
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

**PRESENTED BY
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The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is the national provider of comfort, care, and resources to all those grieving the death of a military or veteran loved one. TAPS was founded in 1994 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to provide 24/7 care to all military survivors, regardless of a service member's duty status at the time of death, a survivor's relationship to the deceased service member, or the circumstances or geography of a service member's death.

TAPS provides comprehensive support through services and programs that include peer-based emotional support, casework, assistance with education benefits, and community-based grief and trauma resources, all delivered at no cost to military survivors. TAPS offers additional programs, including, but not limited to, the following: the 24/7 National Military Survivor Helpline; national, regional, and community programs to facilitate a healthy grief journey for survivors of all ages; and information and resources provided through the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing. TAPS extends a significant service to military survivors by facilitating meaningful connections to peer survivors with shared loss experiences.

In 1994, Bonnie Carroll founded TAPS after the death of her husband, Brigadier General Tom Carroll, who was killed along with seven other soldiers in 1992 when their Army National Guard plane crashed in the mountains of Alaska. Since its founding, TAPS has provided care and support to more than 120,000 bereaved military survivors.

In 2024 alone, 8,911 newly bereaved military and veteran survivors connected to TAPS for care and services, the most in our 30-year history. This is an average of 24 new survivors coming to TAPS each and every day. Of the survivors seeking our care in 2024, 37 percent were grieving the death of a military loved one to illness, including as a result of exposure to toxins; 29 percent were grieving the death of a military loved one to suicide; and only 3 percent were grieving the death of a military loved one to hostile action.

As the leading nonprofit organization offering military grief support, TAPS builds a community of survivors helping survivors heal. TAPS provides connections to a network of peer-based emotional support and critical casework assistance, empowering survivors to grow with their grief. Engaging with TAPS programs and services has inspired many survivors to care for other more newly bereaved survivors by working and volunteering for TAPS.

Chairman Luttrell and Ranking Member McGarvey, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Disability and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is grateful for the opportunity to provide a statement for the record on issues of importance to the 120,000-plus surviving family members of all ages, representing all services, and with losses from all causes who we have been honored to serve.

The mission of TAPS is to provide comfort, care, and resources for all those grieving the death of a military loved one, regardless of the manner or location of death, the duty status at the time of death, the survivor's relationship to the deceased, or the survivor's phase in their grief journey. Part of that commitment includes advocating for improvements in programs and services provided by the U.S. federal government — the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Education (DoED), Department of Labor (DOL), and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) — and state and local governments.

TAPS and the VA have mutually benefited from a long-standing, collaborative working relationship. In 2014, TAPS and the VA entered into a Memorandum of Agreement that formalized their partnership with the goal of providing earlier and expedited access to crucial survivor services. In 2023, TAPS and the VA renewed and expanded their formal partnership to better serve our survivor community. TAPS works with military and veteran survivors to identify, refer, and apply for resources available within the VA, including education, burial, benefits and entitlements, grief counseling, and survivor assistance.

TAPS also works collaboratively with the VA and DOD Survivors Forum, which serves as a clearinghouse for information on government and private-sector programs and policies affecting surviving families. Through its quarterly meetings, TAPS shares information on its programs and services as well as fulfills any referrals to support all those grieving the death of a military or veteran loved one.

TAPS President and Founder Bonnie Carroll served on the Department of Veterans Affairs Federal Advisory Committee on *Veterans' Families, Caregivers, and Survivors*, where she chaired the Subcommittee on Survivors. The committee advises the Secretary of the VA on matters related to veterans' families, caregivers, and survivors across all generations, relationships, and veteran statuses. Ms. Carroll is also a distinguished recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

CARING FOR SURVIVORS ACT OF 2025 (H.R. 2055)

TAPS Strongly Supports

TAPS remains committed to improving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and providing equity with other federal benefits. DIC is a tax-free benefit paid to eligible surviving spouses, dependent children, or dependent parents of service members who die in the line of duty or veterans whose death resulted from a service-related injury or illness. More than 506,000 surviving spouses receive DIC from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The current monthly DIC base rate for eligible surviving spouses is \$1,653.07 (Dec. 1, 2024)¹ and has only increased due to cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) since 1993. TAPS is working with Congress to raise DIC from 43 percent to 55 percent (\$2,107.22) of the compensation rate paid to a 100 percent disabled veteran, in parity with other federal survivor programs; ensure the DIC base rate is increased equally; and protect added monthly amounts, like the child stipend, eight-year provision, and Aid and Attendance.

TAPS is also working to reduce the time frame a veteran needs to be rated totally disabled from 10 to five years to assist families who have become caregivers for their disabled veteran, and to allow more survivors to become eligible for DIC benefits.

TAPS and the survivor community have supported strengthening DIC for many years, especially for military survivors whose only recompense is DIC. We are grateful to Representatives Jahana Hayes (D-CT-5) and co-lead Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-1), and 55 original co-sponsors for reintroducing the ***Caring for Survivors Act of 2025 (H.R. 2055)***, which will increase DIC by \$454 a month.

Passing this important bipartisan and bicameral legislation in the 119th Congress is a top priority for The Military Coalition (TMC) Survivor Committee, which TAPS co-chairs. TMC consists of 35 veteran service organizations representing more than 5.5 million members of the uniformed services — active, reserve, retired, survivors, veterans, and their families.

TAPS appreciates the VA's position on the ***Caring for Survivors Act of 2025***, "VA supports the bill, subject to amendment and the availability of appropriations," submitted for the record before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on March 11, 2025.²

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<https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/survivor-compensation/dependency-indemnity-compensation/survivor-rates/>

² <https://www.veterans.senate.gov/services/files/CCE1F4F4-01CD-4364-9B72-28F9253987A1>

TAPS respectfully asks the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to rescore the ***Caring for Survivors Act*** based on new data since the passing of the PACT Act. The VA estimated that there were potentially 382,000 survivors who may be eligible for PACT Act-related benefits, but this number includes all manners of death, including those who died of natural causes, old age, by suicide, or in car accidents, not just those filing claims related to toxic exposure. To date, nearly 37,000 survivors have submitted claims for PACT Act-related benefits, almost 31,000 have been completed, and close to 15,000 claims have been approved.³ These benefits, to include DIC, are life-changing for surviving families, and TAPS is proud of the instrumental role we played in passing this historic bipartisan legislation. However, based on nearly three years of data since the PACT Act became law on Aug. 10, 2022, the number of survivors now eligible for DIC is far less than the VA's original estimate. This should be factored into any CBO scoring of bills related to DIC, to include the ***Caring for Survivors Act of 2025***.

The following statements from survivors demonstrate that stringent limitations on DIC payments have negative financial and widespread impacts on housing, employment, transportation, food security, and medical and mental health care for surviving veteran and military families:

Amanda Lee Pitzer, Surviving Spouse of CPO Larry Pitzer Jr. of North Carolina, U.S. Navy

“Losing my husband changed every aspect of my life — emotionally, mentally, and financially. As a widow and a mother, my greatest concern has always been ensuring stability for my family.

“While Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) provides some support, the reality is that at only 43 percent of a 100 percent disability rating, it simply isn’t enough to keep surviving families financially secure. The gap between what is provided and what is actually needed forces many of us into impossible situations, choosing between paying bills, securing our futures, or being present for our children. For me, that meant returning to school to earn my doctorate and taking on five part-time jobs just to bridge the gap. Despite my education and qualifications, I am still years behind my peers in both earnings and retirement savings, with no access to employer-sponsored benefits, like retirement accounts.

*“Like so many other survivors, I am constantly running on empty — physically, emotionally, and financially — just trying to stay afloat. If the ***Caring for Survivors Act*** is passed, it would be life-changing.*

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https://department.va.gov/pactdata/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2025/05/VA-PACT-Act-Dashboard-Issue49_052325.pdf

“Raising DIC to 55 percent, bringing it in line with other federal survivor benefits, would provide much-needed financial relief to families like mine. It would mean that widows and widowers wouldn’t have to overextend themselves with multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Instead, they could focus on building sustainable careers, securing their financial futures, and — most importantly — being present for their children.

“This increase would acknowledge that the sacrifices made by our fallen service members do not end with their passing. Their families continue to bear the weight of their loss, and they deserve support that reflects the true cost of that sacrifice.

*“Passing the **Caring for Survivors Act** wouldn’t just correct an unfair disparity, it would send a powerful message that our nation truly honors and supports the families of its fallen heroes. For so many of us, this is not just about numbers on a page, it is about survival, stability, and the ability to rebuild a future with dignity and hope.”*

Heather Welker, Surviving Spouse of SSG Mark Welker of Missouri, Missouri National Guard

“My husband loved this country and gave it 21 years of his life. During those years, he would always tell me, ‘It’s for our future.’ So his career was first priority, which took time away from family. It was supposed to make retirement years easier for us, or so we thought.

“In October of 2022, he was diagnosed with cancer, and the tumor was in a location that had no possibility of surgery because of organs and arteries. It also denied him the ability to continue working, so he was granted disability. I soon had to leave my employment of 18 years to be his caregiver. Fast forward to March 5, 2024, that morning, my husband died from his service-connected cancer. We were robbed of our golden years together.

“I have not been able to find employment comparable to what I had before, plus the loss of any income he provided through disability. The increase in DIC to 55 percent of the single disability rate would allow breathing room. I would not be looking for a second job at the age of 54.”

Lynn Tennant, Surviving Spouse of SSG Adrian Tennant of New York, U.S. Army

“Adrian, a 20-year retired Army veteran, lost his life after a very brief and hard 34-day battle with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) T-Cell. He left behind me, his wife of 18 years, and two young children, ages 13 and 9 at the time. Adrian had only been retired from the Army for seven years. He never truly got to enjoy his retirement, as he enrolled

in college to pursue a career in information technology. I gave up my career to let him follow his goals and raise our children.

“His loss has put a great financial burden on me to raise our two children. I was awarded DIC finally after five years, which I am thankful for, but between that, Social Security benefits, and my job, it still isn’t enough in these tough economic times. I am heading back to school to further my career in education, but the loss of his income and retirement pay has made things very difficult.”

Elly Gibbons, Surviving Spouse of CMSgt John Gibbons of Arkansas, U.S. Air Force

“My husband served for 38 years and died due to Agent Orange exposure. Upon his death, my income decreased by 70 percent. His Social Security was affected by the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), so I cannot draw from his Social Security.

*“I fought for seven years to help rectify the SBP/DIC offset, which was finally rectified due to grassroots efforts by those affected by the incomprehensible wrong. Now we continue a fight to address the **Caring for Survivors Act**, which would finally increase DIC to the appropriate level of 55 percent in parity with ALL other federal survivors’ benefits. The increase in income would have a tremendous positive impact on so many survivors of those who have served our nation, our patriots. Thank you.”*

Harry McNally, Surviving Spouse of SGT Shanna Golden of Virginia, U.S. Army

“Increasing the amount of DIC to levels identical to other federal survivor benefits should have been done decades ago. As it stands, the implication is that the death of a veteran or service member is worth less than the death of other federal employees.”

Katie Hubbard, Surviving Spouse of CSM James Hubbard Jr. of Kansas, U.S. Army

“Due to his status at the time of my husband’s death, the only financial benefit we are eligible for is DIC. CSM James W. Hubbard Jr. died May 21, 2009, while in treatment for leukemia caused by the burn pits in Iraq.

“Having your income cut by more than 60 percent while trying to navigate funeral costs, bills that aren’t stopping, and unexpected ambulance and ER charges nearly took me out too. My mental health was not conducive to returning to the workplace quickly after being his caregiver and dealing with the unexpected loss, yet I had to figure out something to make up the income or lose our home, too. My future, my best friend, and my normal were gone.

*“While a 12 percent increase doesn’t seem like much, any widow living paycheck to paycheck can tell you it is. The military is a federal entity, yet its survivors are treated less than. Passing the **Caring for Survivors Act** would show military widows that their spouse and they are cared for and not forgotten.”*

Janet Albaugh, Surviving Spouse of SP5 Rick Albaugh of South Carolina, U.S. Army

“There needs to be a change in the way DIC is allowed. It's not the fault of the veteran that they couldn't live until the 10-year rule! My husband did two tours in Vietnam, and he was sprayed with Agent Orange. He had everything wrong with his respiratory system known to man. It's just not fair that we don't get any help because our veteran died too soon! Believe me, ALL widows would rather have our husbands still here with us. It's a real hardship to try and hang on to what we fought so hard to build.

*“Is it really fair that we not only lose our husbands, but we lose everything else too? They fought for our country and did ALL they were asked to do. Please pass the **Caring for Survivors Act**. It would help all of us widows who have already lost so very much!”*

VETERANS LAW JUDGE EXPERIENCE ACT (H.R. 659)

TAPS Supports

TAPS appreciates Congresswoman Julia Brownley (D-CA-26) and the late Congressman Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-7) for reintroducing the **Veterans Law Judge Experience Act (H.R. 659)**, which prioritizes hiring judges with at least three years of experience in veterans’ law to serve as members of the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.

Having judges with specialized expertise can lead to more efficient case handling, improve the accuracy and consistency of decisions, and help retain experienced and high-performing professionals. Given the ongoing backlog TAPS is seeing with claims and appeals, we believe this bill will accelerate the appeals process, significantly reduce the claims backlog, and improve decision outcomes for our veterans and their survivors.

FALLEN SERVICEMEMBERS RELIGIOUS HERITAGE RESTORATION ACT (H.R. 2701)

TAPS Strongly Supports

TAPS strongly supports the **Fallen Servicemembers Religious Heritage Restoration Act (H.R. 2701)**. This critical legislation would establish a 10-year program within the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) to identify and conduct research on

service members who are incorrectly memorialized in military cemeteries abroad. It would also empower the ABMC to locate and engage surviving families to facilitate the correction of grave markers to properly reflect the service member's religious heritage.

TAPS greatly appreciates Representatives Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL-25), Max Miller (R-OH-7), Daniel Goldman (D-NY-10), Lois Frankel (D-FL-22), Bradley Scott Schneider (D-IL-10), Laura Friedman (D-CA-30), and Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ-5) for their commitment to recognizing and honoring the personal faith of those who gave their lives in service to our nation. It is a sacred obligation to ensure that every American service member who fought and died for our country has their beliefs and heritage properly honored — wherever they are laid to rest.

TAPS urges the subcommittee to advance the ***Fallen Servicemembers Religious Heritage Restoration Act*** and calls on the full House to pass this important legislation without delay.

HONORING OUR HEROES ACT (H.R. 2721)

TAPS Supports

TAPS thanks Representative Timothy Kennedy (D-NY-26) for introducing the ***Honoring Our Heroes Act of 2025 (H.R. 2721)***, which would establish a two-year pilot program under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide headstones or burial markers for eligible veterans who died before Nov. 1, 1990, and may have been previously ineligible under existing memorial programs.

This legislation aims to address gaps in veteran memorial coverage, especially for older veterans, by allowing family members, descendants, or representatives to request memorial markers to honor the veteran's service.

Many veterans from earlier generations — particularly those who served in World War I, World War II, Korea, or Vietnam — may lie in unmarked graves or without federal recognition of their service. This bill provides a chance to correct that oversight and ensure that every veteran, regardless of when they passed, is honored with the dignity and recognition they have earned and deserve.

ERNEST PELTZ ACCRUED VETERANS BENEFITS ACT (H.R. 3123)

TAPS Strongly Supports

TAPS appreciates Representatives Elise Stefanik (R-NY-21) and Ro Khanna (D-CA-17) for introducing the ***Ernest Peltz Accrued Veterans Benefits Act (H.R. 3123)***, which

would guarantee that veterans' pensions already awarded — but not paid before death — are delivered to the appropriate survivors, ensuring veterans' families receive the benefits they have earned.

If a veteran is granted a pension before passing away — but dies before receiving payment — the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) must pay the unpaid pension to the first eligible individual in the following order: the veteran's spouse, children (shared equally), dependent parents (shared equally), and estate, if none of the above apply. To receive the unpaid pension, an application must be filed within one year of the veteran's death. If no claim is made during that period, the payment defaults to the estate.

This legislation corrects a common gap in benefits delivery, where families of deceased veterans miss out on rightful pension payments simply due to administrative timing or lack of awareness. It ensures that veterans' benefits serve their intended purpose — even if the veteran passes before funds are received.

VETERANS' CAREGIVER APPEALS MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2025 (H.R. 3833)

TAPS Strongly Supports

TAPS strongly supports the ***Veterans' Caregiver Appeals Modernization Act of 2025 (H.R. 3833)***, which seeks to improve the VA's caregiver support program by making the application and appeals processes more accessible, efficient, and fair for veterans and their family caregivers.

TAPS thanks Congressman Tom Barrett (R-MI-07), Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Technology Modernization, for introducing this important legislation, which would direct the VA to develop a centralized digital platform for reviewing caregiver applications and appeals. This system will allow VA staff and Board of Veterans' Appeals personnel to access all related documents and communications in one place — helping streamline decision-making and reduce delays.

Many veterans rely heavily on family caregivers, and those caregivers, many of whom become survivors, deserve a fair, transparent system for accessing the benefits and support they've earned. This legislation directly responds to widespread concerns about inconsistent decisions, delays in appeals, and the impact of a veteran's death on pending survivor benefits.

If a veteran dies while an appeal is pending, the caregiver's eligibility to receive unpaid monthly stipends will still be honored — based on documentation available at the time of the veteran's death. This ensures caregivers who become survivors are not unfairly penalized due to delays in the VA process.

In 2024 alone, nearly 9,000 newly bereaved military and veteran survivors connected to TAPS for care and services, the most in our 30-year history. This is an average of 24 new survivors coming to TAPS each and every day. Of the survivors seeking our care in 2024, 37 percent were grieving the death of a military loved one to illness, and many were caregivers to their veterans before their passing.

This important legislation will positively impact the lives of our nation's veterans, their caregivers, and survivors, and we urge its swift passage.

MODERNIZING ALL VETERANS AND SURVIVORS CLAIMS PROCESSING ACT (H.R. 3854)

TAPS Strongly Supports

TAPS appreciates Representative David Valadao (R-CA-22) for reintroducing the ***Modernizing All Veterans and Survivors Claims Processing Act***, which would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to report on efforts to expand the use of automation tools to process veterans' and survivors' claims.

The VA's Disability Compensation Service has access to more automation tools than the Pension and Fiduciary Service, which has proven to help lower processing times for veteran claimants. Expanding access to automation tools for other VA subdivisions will help decrease processing times and enhance accuracy.

TAPS has long advocated for expanding the use of automation tools across the VA to ensure veteran and survivor claims are processed in a more expedient manner. We are pleased that this important legislation prioritizes deploying these tools to the Pension and Fiduciary Service, Education Service, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Debt Management Center, and the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

The use of automation tools will help improve efficiency, accuracy, and communication within the VA claims process by automatically retrieving service and health records for veterans and survivors. These tools will also help compile and evaluate evidence for claims, provide automated decision support to assist VA staff, and enable automated data-sharing across federal agencies.

TAPS appreciates the VA announcing major survivor benefits reforms in May 2025, which include working to identify areas where automation can be used to make the DIC claims process easier for survivors to navigate. According to the VA, the "VA now automates more than 1,000 DIC claims payments or adjustments per day and is in the process of ongoing enhancements to increase automation that will expedite survivors' claims and improve their experience. VA will also be identifying additional areas where

automation can be used to make all benefits delivery processes easier to navigate for eligible surviving dependents.”⁴

This is a critical step forward to enhancing support for surviving families, and TAPS is grateful to the VA. We await the VA’s opinion on this bill, but believe it would help codify the work already being done by the VA and ensure advancements in the survivor claims process are protected in perpetuity.

PROTECTING VETERANS CLAIM OPTIONS ACT (DRAFT)

TAPS Supports

TAPS appreciates House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL-12) for introducing the ***Protecting Veterans Claims Options Act*** to ensure fairness and flexibility in the appeals process for veterans by clarifying the rules governing the Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA).

This important legislation would ensure that when veterans file a supplemental claim, the BVA cannot deny the case solely because no new evidence was submitted. This protects veterans’ rights to have their claims reviewed on the merits, even when additional evidence isn’t available right away.

If a claim is remanded back to the Board from the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, veterans and their representatives have 90 days to submit new evidence. The BVA is required to consider that new evidence directly, which improves veterans’ ability to strengthen their claims without unnecessary delays.

This legislation will help ensure that veterans are not unfairly denied benefits over procedural technicalities, have the opportunity to submit evidence after a court remand, and receive a more thorough and just review of their appeals by the BVA.

JUSTICE FOR AMERICA’S VETERANS AND SURVIVORS ACT OF 2025 (H.R. 3627)

TAPS Strongly Supports

TAPS is grateful to Representatives Chuck Edwards (R-NC-11) and Kelly Morrison (D-MN-03) for introducing the ***Justice for America’s Veterans and Survivors Act of 2025*** to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) collects cause-of-death data for deceased veterans.

⁴ <https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-announces-major-survivor-benefits-reforms/>

While the VA does a fantastic job of tracking major data categories for surviving families, the one major piece of information that the VA does not currently track is the “cause of death” of the veteran. While the VA currently supports 506,000 surviving spouses, it cannot tell you what percentage are suicide, illness, combat-related, or training accident-related deaths. This information would be crucial to ensure that VA and other organizations are providing the necessary care and programs those families need.

During a meeting with the VA last year, we were informed that because the VA does not track cause of death, the potential 382,000 PACT Act-impacted survivors includes all manners of death, including those who died of natural causes, age-related conditions, by suicide, or in car accidents, not just those filing claims related to toxic exposure. This helps to explain why, after extensive outreach by the VA and organizations like TAPS, to date, just under 37,000 survivors have applied for PACT-related benefits. Unfortunately, the potential survivor numbers have also informed the Congressional Budget Office’s (CBO) scoring of current survivor legislation, ***Love Lives On Act*** and ***Caring for Survivors Act***, almost doubling the cost and creating exorbitant scores, making it difficult to find funding.

This type of data is critical to tailoring programming for surviving families as well as research into suicide prevention, toxic exposures, and illnesses that have led to the tragic deaths of many veterans. The Department of Defense (DoD) has been doing this for many years, so it is logical to presume the VA can and should do the same.

This important bipartisan legislation, spearheaded by TAPS, will empower lawmakers, advocates, and service organizations with clearer insight into veteran mortality trends — especially related to suicide and service-connected disabilities.

By enhancing data collection and analysis, the ***Justice for America’s Veterans and Survivors Act of 2025*** will help support life-saving efforts to prevent veteran suicide, target critical mental health resources, and shape more effective veteran support policies. TAPS is committed to working with Congress to pass this important legislation within the 119th Congress.

RURAL VETERANS’ IMPROVED ACCESS TO BENEFITS ACT OF 2025 (DRAFT)

TAPS Supports

TAPS thanks Representative Juan Ciscomani (R-AZ-6) for reintroducing the ***Rural Veterans’ Improved Access to Benefits Act of 2025***, which expands and streamlines the process by which contract health care professionals can perform medical disability exams for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). While this bill primarily codifies current VA policy, formalizing it is important to ensure that future administrations also contract physicians to assist with disability exams.

This important legislation addresses the challenges many veterans face in accessing timely evaluations necessary for their benefits, especially veterans who live in rural areas. It allows qualified health care professionals with a valid, unrestricted license — regardless of their state — to conduct VA medical disability exams, as long as they're not barred from practicing anywhere in the U.S.

TAPS believes this bill will help reduce wait times and improve benefit access for veterans — especially those in rural or underserved communities — by increasing the availability of qualified medical examiners. It reflects a commitment to ensuring all veterans receive the care and evaluations they've earned, without being limited by outdated licensing barriers.

VETERANS APPEALS EFFICIENCY ACT OF 2025 (H.R. 3835)

TAPS Strongly Supports

TAPS greatly appreciates House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL-12) for introducing the ***Veterans Appeals Efficiency Act of 2025 (H.R. 3835)***, which aims to improve how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) handles benefits claims and appeals — making the process faster, more transparent, and easier to track for veterans and their families.

In 2017, Congress passed the ***VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act*** in response to the nationwide VA access crisis that negatively impacted veterans' care. This critical law gave "VA leaders the ability to break through bureaucratic obstacles to discipline or fire poor-performing employees, providing VA employees a healthier workplace, and increasing veterans' trust in the VA."⁵

This important legislation expands on the 2017 law by directing the VA to report on how long remanded claims are pending, how many cases have been expedited, and how many appeals have been dismissed — including those due to a veteran's death or suicide. The VA would also be required to define what qualifies a veteran's appeal for faster review and track the progress and delays of claims to help ensure fair and timely consideration.

The ***Veterans Appeals Efficiency Act of 2025*** would also grant the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims expanded authority to send cases back for focused review and oversee class actions involving similar claims — empowering veterans to resolve shared legal challenges together.

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<https://www.veterans.senate.gov/2025/1/chairmen-moran-bost-lead-colleagues-in-introducing-legislation-to-restore-accountability-at-va>

VETERANS CLAIMS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2025 (DRAFT)

TAPS Strongly Supports

TAPS greatly appreciates Chairman Morgan Luttrell (R-TX-8) for reintroducing the ***Veterans Claims Quality Improvement Act of 2025*** to improve the accuracy and accountability of VA decisions on veterans' benefits claims, with a special focus on reducing unnecessary delays and remands.

This important legislation requires VA staff who make avoidable errors that delay claims processing to be notified of their mistakes, promoting accountability and better outcomes for veterans. The VA would also be required to review and report on past legal opinions that may have led to inconsistent decisions, especially on cases appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

The bill further requires the VA to create a formal program to track errors, trends, and remands by the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA) and report these findings to Congress. By evaluating the performance of individual board members, the aim is to catch and fix mistakes early. Board members and staff will be required to undergo enhanced, data-informed training to ensure accurate, timely claims adjudication. When claims are sent back for further review, the VA will be required to explain why and identify whether it failed to meet its duty to assist or notify veterans properly.

TAPS strongly supports the ***Veterans Claims Quality Improvement Act of 2025*** to streamline and strengthen the benefits claims process for our nation's veterans and their families.

CONCLUSION

TAPS thanks the leadership of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Disability and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, distinguished members, and professional staff for convening this important hearing to address key veteran and survivor legislation. TAPS is honored to testify on behalf of the thousands of surviving families we serve.