

501(C)(3) Veterans Non-Profit

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

FOR THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

ON

PENDING LEGISLATION

FEBRUARY 3, 2026

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 some of the bills being examined by the subcommittee today. No group of veterans understand the full scope of benefits and care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) better than PVA members—veterans who have incurred a spinal cord injury or disorder (SCI/D).

H.R. 1004, the Love Lives on Act of 2025

When a military member or veteran dies, their spouse is eligible to receive a number of survivor benefits, but current law strips many of them if the spouse remarries again before age 55. This arbitrary age limit often prevents many surviving spouses from remarrying out of concern for the financial stability of their surviving children. These surviving spouses should be freed from the fear of losing the benefits owed to them through their late spouse's military sacrifice. PVA supports the Love Lives On Act, which would ensure they retain many benefits from both the VA and the Department of Defense (DOD), regardless of their age at the time of remarriage.

H.R. 1685, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2025

Currently, if a veteran was rated totally disabled for a continuous period of at least eight years immediately preceding death, their eligible survivor can receive an additional \$360.85 per month in Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). This monetary installment is commonly referred to as the DIC "kicker."

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is an aggressive disease that quickly leaves veterans incapacitated and reliant on family members and caregivers. Many spouses stop working to provide care for their loved one who, once diagnosed, only has an average lifespan of between three to five years. Because so few veterans survive beyond five years, the surviving spouses of veterans with ALS rarely qualify for the additional DIC benefit. Jann, the surviving spouse of a PVA member, was disqualified for this exact reason. Determined not to let this happen to other spouses, she helped PVA craft the Justice for ALS Veterans Act to make the surviving spouses of future veterans with ALS eligible for the DIC kicker, regardless of how long the veteran had the disease.

Members of this subcommittee were supportive of this legislation when it was reviewed in October of 2021, but some suggested that there may be other service-connected conditions that deserve similar consideration. The VA recognizes ALS as a presumptive service-connected disease, and due to its progressive nature, automatically rates any diagnosed veteran at 100 percent once service connected. Although we are unaware of other service-connected conditions that have a 100 percent mortality rate, like ALS, we are pleased this version of the bill incorporates PVA's recommended language directing the VA to study the matter and provide their findings to Congress. With the addition of this language, Congress should not further delay passage of this critical legislation.

H.R. 6698, the Board of Veterans Appeals Annual Report Transparency Act of 2025

PVA supports efforts like this bill to increase transparency of the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA or Board) process. This legislation would require the Board to identify specific factors that contribute to the delay in the adjudication of pending appeals. PVA supports this bill, which requires these factors to be included in the Board's annual report that is published online to help find these inhibiting factors to help improve the appeals process.

H.R. 6943, the Veterans Burial Allowance and Reimbursement Act of 2026

This legislation would remove the distinction between non-service-connected and service-connected cause of death, as it pertains to eligibility for VA's burial allowance. Currently, a veteran who died due to a service-connected condition is eligible for \$2,000 towards their funeral/burial expenses. A veteran who dies due to a non-service-connected condition is eligible for up to \$1,002 for burial and \$1,002 towards a plot potentially equaling \$2,004 toward funeral/burial expenses. PVA supports this legislation, which removes the service-connected allowance of \$2,000 and instead amends the eligibility for the \$1,002 for burial and \$1,002 plot allowance to include those who die from a service-connected condition.

H.R. 4469, the Providing Radiation Exposed Servicemembers Undisputed Medical Eligibility (PRESUME) Act

Veterans exposed to radiation during service may be eligible for VA disability compensation. Currently, the VA recognizes specific conditions as being presumptively caused by exposure to

ionizing radiation that may have occurred during service. However, when a veteran applies for their compensation benefits, the VA asks DOD's Defense Threat Reduction Agency to confirm exposure and to provide the actual or estimated radiation dose the veteran received. PVA supports this legislation which rescinds the need for a veteran to prove that the amount of ionizing radiation they were exposed was sufficient to warrant service-connection for their conditions.

H.R. 5723, the Fraud Reduction And Uncovering Deception (FRAUD) in VA Disability Exam Act

PVA supports the intent of this legislation and appreciates that the bill seeks to look at Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) submitted from all sources, not just the veteran. However, we disagree that individuals responsible for processing claims for benefits have the adequate expertise to identify and report issues with DBQs. Also, we are concerned that this legislation does not specify who in the process will be responsible for identifying and reporting fraud. Adding requirements like this would help improve the oversight process that already exists.

PVA strongly believes that the VA could improve the quality control review of an incoming DBQ before it is input into a veteran's file, and further, can ensure that fraud can be investigated and prosecuted. Currently, VA claims processors have the authority "to evaluate and weigh all evidence of record, including privately completed DBQs. If it is determined that a privately completed DBQ contains indicator(s) of inauthenticity that are substantive enough to deem it potentially inauthentic or fraudulent, claims processors have the authority to assign low or no probative value to the privately completed DBQ." But if a DBQ is completed by a contracted examiner, the claims processors "are not expected to routinely scrutinize or question the credentials of clinical personnel to determine the acceptability of their reports, unless there is contradictory evidence of record." However, according to the VA's Clinician's Guide, it informs contract providers, "It is important to remember that [Veterans Benefits Administration] Raters are not clinicians and therefore may not understand concepts that are considered basic or assumed by those educated in the field of medicine." This leads to obvious questions of whether the claims processors are actually picking up on the adequacy of DBQs and the possibility of fraudulent/inconsistent findings being recorded by either outside providers or contracted examiners.

VA's Medical Disability Examiners Office (MDEO) presently employs approximately 20 quality analysts whose job is to review DBQs that are received from contractors and determine whether or not they are "contractually compliant" by ensuring that the reports include all requested issues, reviewing for discrepancies, and whether or not the report described the condition(s) that have impacted the veterans ability to work, among other requirements. However, these analysts only have access to the DBQs after they have been uploaded to the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS), which is the same time claims processors receive them. Many times, this is too late as the processors are waiting to finalize a claim and only need the DBQ to finish the rating process. According to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report from August 2025, "MDEO also analyzes the effects

of checklist errors on claims, such as delays associated with correcting errors. MDEO officials say many claims continue through processing and are decided before the office completes its checklist review. After MDEO identifies errors, claims processors determine if the errors affected their decisions on the claims.”

To effectively do their jobs and to provide real oversight to the claims process, PVA believes that MDEO should make two changes to the claims process. First, prior to them being downloaded to VBMS, all DBQs, regardless of whether they are provided by the veteran or a contractor, should go into a drop box that is only accessible by the quality analysts. Second, the quality analysts should be trained and required to review the forms for contractual compliance and for potential fraud/inconsistent findings. Only after this review has been done should the forms be uploaded to VBMS and the claims process be allowed to continue.

H.R. 5339, the Susan E. Lukas 9/11 Servicemember Fairness Act

This legislation would allow presumptive service-connection for eight conditions that veterans who were exposed to toxins during their service at the Pentagon between September 11 and November 19, 2001, subsequently develop. Many service members were exposed to chemicals and toxic substances during the period after the 9/11 terrorist attacks after having to return to duty at the Pentagon before the building was determined to be safe. PVA supports legislation that would help veterans receive their benefits for conditions they incurred due to their time of service.

H.R. 7260, the National Cemetery Administration Annual Report Act of 2026

PVA supports this draft legislation, which would require the VA to submit an annual report on the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). This report would include key information such as the number of interments performed by the NCA by cemetery, burial options at each location, completed or planned cemetery construction projects, and data on grants awarded for veterans cemeteries. Additionally, it allows the VA to include any other metrics they feel would be appropriate. PVA believes this report would help the VA with long-term planning within the NCA to ensure that our veterans and service members’ families can lay their loved ones to rest with dignity and respect for generations to come.

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

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 2026

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events—
Grant to support rehabilitation sports activities — \$368,500.

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.

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.