



## VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA

8719 Colesville Road, Suite 100  
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(301) 585-4000 [vva.org](http://vva.org)

***NEVER AGAIN WILL ONE GENERATION OF VETERANS ABANDON ANOTHER.***



### **Written Testimony of James L. McCormick II, executive director of government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)**

**Before the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA)  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives**

**Tuesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024  
CHOB - 10:15 AM ET**

Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is James L. McCormick II.

I am the Executive Director of Government Affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). I am a retired captain with 22 years of service in the United States Army. That included 16-years as enlisted in the NCO ranks, which then led to my direct commission as a combat arms officer where I spent the last six years of my service in the officer ranks.

I served during the Cold War, the Gulf War, and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Vietnam Veterans of America was founded on the shared resolve of veterans who returned from a very real war to a country unprepared, or sometimes unwilling, to understand the cost of that service.

Formed in 1978, the congressionally chartered organization grew out of Vietnam veterans working together, often unofficially and without institutional support, to demand recognition, including for those invisible wounds of war that would later, because of their fighting for it, become formally recognized as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Guided by our principle that, "*Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another,*" VVA has evolved from advocating for Vietnam veterans alone to standing for all veterans and their families. We strive to ensure that as Vietnam veterans age they receive the healthcare, long-term support, disability and survivor benefits, and dignity they have earned... while also fighting just as fiercely to protect future generations from being ignored, misunderstood, or left to fight alone.

The nine items we've been asked to address largely align with VVA's advocacy; and would likely endorse most while monitoring implementation to avoid administrative pitfalls or unintended restrictions.



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**H.R. 1685 - Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2025:** VVA would strongly support this bill. It addresses a clear inequity for surviving spouses of veterans who die from service-connected ALS, a condition often progressing rapidly and linked to exposures (relevant to Vietnam veterans via Agent Orange or other hazards). Deeming total disability for the full 8-year DIC enhancement period prevents unfair denials due to disease timeline. The reporting requirement on other short-life-expectancy conditions promotes broader equity and oversight—aligning with VVA's push for presumptive and survivor benefits. Minimal VA burden makes it practical. The noted condition about shifting from 90 to 120 days active duty appears to be a mis-reference (bill focuses on DIC rating, not presumption threshold), but VVA would likely back mitigations for edge cases.

**H.R. 2164 - Dayton National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2025:** VVA would support this targeted expansion. Ensuring burial capacity in regions like Dayton prevents future access restrictions for veterans and families. Accepting no-cost land transfer with clear timelines advances NCA goals without new cemetery creation. VVA emphasizes dignified burial access; this addresses a regional constraint efficiently. Risks like timeline delays for reviews are valid watch items, but the bill's direction to VA helps move it forward.

**H.R. 1004 - Love Lives On Act of 2025:** VVA would strongly support this. Eliminating the remarriage penalty for DIC, survivor pensions, SBP, and TRICARE modernizes outdated rules that penalize surviving spouses (often widows) for remarrying, especially after age 55 or if later marriages end. This improves financial/health stability and reflects contemporary realities. Retroactive elements and age provisions help many. VVA has long advocated for survivor equity; this reduces hardship without major drawbacks beyond potential costs (which VVA would argue are justified). Guidance clarity is a key watch item.

**H.R. 6698 - BVA Annual Report Transparency Act of 2025:** VVA would support this. Enhanced BVA reporting on delays, remands (distinguishing legacy/AMA systems), causes, and mitigation plans boosts accountability and identifies root issues (e.g., training, quality). VVA frequently calls for appeals reform and transparency to reduce backlogs/delays affecting veterans. Indirect benefits through pressure for improvements align with priorities. Added workload is a risk, but paired with resources, it could drive real change.

**H.R. 4469 - PRESUME Act:** VVA would strongly support this. Removing dose-proof requirements for radiation-exposed veterans aligns with presumptive frameworks VVA champions (e.g., Agent Orange, burn pits). Many Vietnam-era veterans faced radiation risks; easing evidentiary barriers reduces unfair denials from incomplete records. It simplifies adjudication while potentially increasing grants—consistent with VVA's toxic exposure advocacy. Watch for clear verification standards to maintain integrity.



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### **H.R. 5723 - Fraud Reduction And Uncovering Deception (FRAUD) in VA Disability Exams**

**Act:** VVA would support this. Stronger oversight of contractors via audits, fraud identification (especially DBQs), reporting, and tracking targets bad actors/claim mills without broadly reopening decisions absent criminal conviction. This protects program integrity and veterans from predatory practices. VVA emphasizes contractor accountability; safeguards against delays/false positives on legitimate claims are essential watch items.

**H.R. 5339 - Susan E. Lukas 9/11 Servicemember Fairness Act:** VVA would support this presumption for Pentagon responders on/after 9/11. Broad disease list (respiratory, cancers, etc.) tied to documented hazards eases nexus proof for an identifiable group. While site-specific, it promotes equity for post-9/11 exposures; VVA supports similar presumptions. Cohort verification and outreach are important to avoid burdens.

**H.R. 6943 - Veterans Burial Allowance and Reimbursement Act of 2026:** VVA would cautiously support, pending details. Standardizing/consolidating burial authorities (including service-connected deaths) could simplify processing and reduce confusion. VVA values clear, uniform benefits for families. However, repeals/amendments risk unintended narrowing; VVA would watch for side-by-side comparisons ensuring no eligibility/benefit losses during transition.

**Discussion Draft - National Cemetery Administration Annual Report Act of 2026:** VVA would support this. Detailed annual NCA reporting (interments disaggregated, satisfaction, maps, options, memorials) enhances transparency and oversight of burial access/program performance. Indirectly benefits veterans/families by informing improvements and accountability. Aligns with VVA's interest in dignified, accessible burials nationwide.

I commend the subcommittee for the work it is doing. Helping veterans get the benefits they deserve is noble and required of our government. Too often, it seems that negativity and party-line politics have seeped into veteran policy in ways that create competition instead of compassion, delay instead of care, and noise instead of solutions. We debate labels, eras of service, and party positions while veterans struggle with housing, healthcare, suicide risk, financial insecurity, and dignity at the end of life.

It does not matter what branch they served in. It does not matter when they served. And it does not matter whether they faced combat, supported supply lines, maintained equipment, gathered intelligence, or served in an administrative role. Every one of them raised their right hand and accepted the same obligation. Every one of them made sacrifices that shaped their lives, their families, and this nation.

But advocacy must never devolve into deciding which veterans are most politically convenient to support. The role of Congress is to ensure that every veteran, and every veteran's family, area not hampered by their service, and can live with stability, access care without unnecessary barriers, and age with dignity.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions now or at any time.