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**STATEMENT OF  
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FOR THE RECORD OF THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
MAY 18, 2022**

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Moore and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting DAV (Disabled American Veterans) to testify at today's legislative hearing of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity to consider multiple bills important to our nation's service-disabled veterans.

**H.R. 2650, the Military Spouse Licensing Relief Act of 2021**

The Military Spouse Licensing Relief Act would mandate that each state's licensing authority accept the professional license or certification of a service member or spouse who has relocated to that state because of military orders. DAV understands the challenges facing military spouses; however, DAV has no resolution on this matter and thus, does not have a position on this bill.

**H.R. 3950, the Veterans Medical Legal Partnerships Act of 2021**

This legislation would amend the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to establish a grant program, through the Department of Justice, for states and local governments to partner with non-profit organizations to create medical-legal partnerships.

The purpose of medical-legal partnerships is to help veterans resolve legal issues that can have a negative impact on their health and their family members. Veterans are at higher risk of having legal issues, and unmet legal needs often exacerbate existing health problems. For example, legal assistance receiving a discharge status upgrade, obtaining proper identification or being awarded education benefits can lead to employment opportunities. Consistent employment helps provide money for food and safe housing, which also helps avoid costly emergency health care services. Likewise, legal assistance preventing eviction or foreclosure, improving substandard living conditions or addressing consumer issues, such as debt and bankruptcy, may allow a veteran to secure stable housing. Stable housing reduces stress, allows veterans to focus on their health care decisions and mental health.

There are currently 31 medical-legal partnerships at VA facilities nationwide. Through these partnerships, volunteer attorneys train VA health care teams to screen veterans for unmet legal needs, such as issues related to child custody, elder law, and

landlord-tenant disputes. After screening, medical teams can refer veterans to on-site legal clinics, where attorneys provide them with free legal services for noncriminal cases.

DAV has long-standing support for veterans' justice programs and supports this legislation in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 028, which calls for support of legislation that provides comprehensive VA health care services for enrolled veterans.

### **H.R. 4702, the Military Spouse Tax Act**

The Military Spouse Tax Act would allow military spouses the same option to elect their home residence or domicile for filing state income taxes as their spouses have. DAV does not have a resolution on this issue and takes no position on this bill.

### **H.R. 6124, the VA Home Loan GRACE Act of 2021**

The Home Loan GRACE Act of 2021 would increase VA's authority to back veterans' home loans in accordance with market rates. As the home supply dwindles and makes homeownership a challenge for many Americans, including veterans, DAV understands the importance of this policy. However, we do not have a resolution on this issue and thus, take no position on this bill.

### **H.R. 7753, a bill to extend authority for supportive services for very low-income veteran families in permanent housing**

This legislation extends authorization for VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program through fiscal year 2024.

SSVF awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that can provide case management and supportive services to very low-income veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing. Supportive services may include health care, transportation, personal financial planning, child care, and legal services. SSVF also helps prevent the imminent loss of a veteran's home or identify a new, more suitable housing situation for individuals and families.

DAV supports this legislation in accordance with Resolution No. 119, which supports funding for the Supportive Services for Veterans Families program to ensure prevention of homelessness among veterans and their families.

### **Draft bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to seek to enter into an agreement with an entity to carry out a pilot program under which such entity shall connect homeless veterans to a network of supportive services**

This legislation extends authorization for VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program through fiscal year 2024.

SSVF awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives who can provide case management and supportive services to very low-income veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing. Supportive services may include health care, transportation, personal financial planning, child care, and legal services. SSVF

may also help prevent the imminent loss of a veteran's home or identify a new, more suitable housing situation for individuals and families.

DAV supports this legislation in accordance with Resolution No. 119, which supports funding for VA's Supportive Services for Veterans Families program to ensure prevention of homelessness among veterans and their families.

**Draft bill, to expand eligibility for, and extend authorization of, certain programs for homeless veterans**

This draft legislation extends authorization for VA's Health Care for Homeless Veterans program. It also amends section 2002(b) of title 38, United States Code, to expand eligibility for this program to veterans who are suffering from serious mental illness. The bill also extends authorization for VA's program of administration of sites offering comprehensive, specialized services to homeless veterans in the nation's 20 largest metropolitan areas.

DAV supports this legislation in accordance with Resolution No. 119, which urges Congress to sustain sufficient funding to improve VA's outreach efforts to help ensure homeless veterans gain access to the VA's specialized health and benefits programs.

**Draft bill to extend Department of Veterans Affairs assistance for individuals residing temporarily in housing owned by a family member**

Title 38, United States Code, Section 2102A authorizes VA to provide assistance in acquiring housing adaptations to disabled veterans temporarily residing in a residence owned by a family member. This legislation extends authorization for this authority until 2027. DAV supports the extension of this program in accordance with our statement of policy.

**Draft bill to extend certain Department of Veterans Affairs programs for homeless veterans**

This draft legislation extends authorization for VA's grant program to assist homeless veterans with special needs. These include homeless veterans who are chronically mentally ill, frail elderly, terminally ill and those who have care of minor dependents. The bill also extends authorization for VA's program of administration of sites offering comprehensive, specialized services to homeless veterans in the nation's 20 largest metropolitan areas.

DAV strongly supports this legislation in accordance with Resolution No. 119, which urges Congress to sustain sufficient funding to improve VA's outreach efforts to help ensure homeless veterans gain access to the VA's specialized health services and benefits programs.

**Discussion Draft, Amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 6307, the Tiny Homes for Homeless Veterans Act**

The Tiny Homes for Homeless Veterans Act would create a pilot program that would provide grants for recipients to build five villages of individualized tiny homes for transitional

housing for our nation's homeless veterans. The villages would include wrap-around supportive services for the veterans and their families.

Homelessness continues to be a significant issue in the veteran community. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 19,750 veterans are homeless on any given night. Approximately twice that many veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year. Some of the leading causes of veteran homelessness include post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, unemployment and a lack of social support networks.

Tiny home villages that provide supportive services to veterans have been successfully implemented in communities around the country. DAV supports launching these programs in more areas in accordance with DAV Resolution 119, which supports adequate funding for comprehensive homelessness programs. However, we suggest VA and/or HUD provide technical advice on concerns like zoning laws and housing codes. Additionally, we believe this legislation, if enacted, should receive its own funding rather than a share of the already inadequate grant and per diem provider (GDP) budget.

**Draft bill to expand and improve the Department of Veterans Affairs COVID-19 veteran rapid retraining assistance program and high technology pilot program**

The Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) is a benefit for veterans who are unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are not entitled to other VA education or employment programs or benefits. Through this program, VA pays for these veterans to train in one of over 200 high-demand or high technology occupations to help get them back into the workforce. The proposed legislation makes improvements to VRRAP. Most notably, it raises the maximum allowed training time from 12 months to 24 months.

DAV supports this legislation in accordance with DAV Resolution No. 174, which affirms support for legislation that would improve and protect the VA's education and employment benefits for service-disabled veterans and their survivors.

**Draft bill, the Building Credit Access for Veterans Act of 2022**

The Building Credit Access for Veterans Act would require VA to carry out a pilot program on using alternative credit scoring information for veterans and members of the Armed Forces. Creditworthiness is an important building block for financial stability. It may impact service members and veterans' ability to receive home and business loans or even enter contracts including rental agreements. While DAV understands the unique stressors of military life that may lead a service member or veteran to get into trouble with credit, we do not have a resolution on this issue and thus are unable to take a position on this bill.

**Draft bill, the Improving the VA Home Loan Benefit Act of 2022**

The Improving the VA Home Loan Benefit Act directs VA to modify its appraisal requirements for VA home loans to clarify when an appraisal is required, how an appraisal is to be conducted, and who is eligible to conduct an appraisal. DAV does not have a resolution on this issue and takes no position on this bill.

### **Draft bill, the Empowering Veterans Against Cyberthreats Act**

The Empowering Veterans Against Cyberthreats Act would direct VA to establish a grant program to enable grantees to train veterans to improve cyber hygiene, increase digital literacy and vigilance, and use digital platforms in civically and socially responsible ways. DAV appreciates the need to educate and train veterans on personal cybersecurity as an element of our overall national security measures; however, we have no resolution on the matter and take no position on this bill.

### **Draft bill, the Emergency Relief for Servicemembers Act**

The Emergency Relief for Servicemembers Act would authorize the termination of certain consumer contracts by service members who enter into such a contract after receiving military orders for permanent change of station, but then receive a stop movement order due to an emergency situation or a deployment. This bill would ensure service members are not penalized when the needs of military service affect existing contracts and commitments; however, we have no resolution on the matter and take no position on this bill.

### **Draft bill to provide for the approval of certain study-abroad programs for purposes of the educational assistance programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs**

This draft bill would allow VA to approve certain study-abroad programs for educational assistance. We understand that study-abroad experiences can enrich academic experiences and cultural understanding for many students; however, DAV has no resolution on this matter and thus, does not have a position on this bill.

### **Draft bill to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs an Office of Food Insecurity**

This legislation addresses the issue of food insecurity among veterans by establishing an Office of Food Insecurity within the VA. The responsibilities of this office would include: providing information to veterans regarding the availability of, and eligibility requirements for federal nutrition assistance programs; collaborating with other VA program offices to identify and treat veterans at risk of or experiencing food insecurity; and collaborating with the Department of Defense to develop materials for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) curriculum related to food insecurity.

In addition, this legislation directs VA to launch a five-year pilot program, under which grants would be awarded to entities to combat food insecurity among veterans. Assistance provided would include increasing access to and enrollment in federal assistance programs, such as the supplemental nutrition assistance program and the low-income home energy assistance program, nutrition-related training and education, and direct food assistance.

A May 2021, U.S. Department of Agriculture report, *Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans*, found that 11.1% of working-age veterans lived in food-insecure households, and 5.3% lived in households with very low food security, meaning at least some people in the household were missing meals or eating less than a full meal. Those

who are younger, recently left active-duty military service, and have a lower final military paygrade are at a higher risk of food insecurity. Female veterans, those who served in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, veterans who are disabled, suffering serious mental illness, or who have experienced homelessness also have higher rates of food insecurity.

DAV recognizes that food insecurity is a growing problem among veterans, especially service-disabled veterans. We support this draft bill and appreciate the efforts to address this issue.

**Discussion Draft, to provide for the eligibility for educational assistance under the Department of Veterans Affairs Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of certain individuals who receive sole survivorship discharges**

This legislation would expand eligibility for the Post 9/11 GI Bill to veterans who receive sole survivorship discharges. The term “sole survivorship discharge” means the separation of a member from the armed forces, at the request of the member, who is the only surviving child in a family in which the father, mother or one or more siblings served in the armed forces and was killed, died as a result of wounds, accident or disease, is in a captured or missing in action status or is permanently 100% disabled or hospitalized on a continuing basis. Currently, a service member who receives a sole survivorship discharge but has not either served at least 90 days on active duty – continuous or non-continuous – on or after September 11, 2001, or served for at least 30 continuous days on or after September 11, 2001 is not eligible for Post 9/11 GI Bill educational assistance. DAV does not have a resolution on this issue takes no position on this bill.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or members of the Subcommittee may have.