STATEMENT OF
JOHN E. BELL III
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LOAN GUARANTY SERVICE
VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION (VBA)
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, and other members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting us here today to present our views on several bills that would affect VA programs and services. My VBA colleagues, Nick Pamperin, Executive Director, Veteran Readiness and Employment Service, Thomas Alphonso, Assistant Director of Policy and Implementation, Education Service, and from VHA, Ms. Jill Albanese, Director of Clinical Operations, Homeless Program Office are joining me today.

H.R. 913 "Streamlining Aviation for Eligible Veterans Act of 2025" (or the "SAFE Veterans Act of 2025")

This bill would increase the number of available flight training rehabilitation programs; however, it would remove the requirement that flight training must be part of a degree program and would allow for the requirement of a certification only.

VA is still reviewing and assessing the bill at this time and will therefore not provide views.

H.R. 980 "Modernizing the Veterans On-Campus Experience Act of 2025"

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3697B(a) to, in effect, expand the qualifications for professionals who can provide on-campus educational and vocational counseling to Veterans. This change would allow other professionals in related fields, such as a benefits counselors or outreach specialists, beyond rehabilitation counseling, to provide these services. By broadening the eligibility criteria, this measure would increase the availability of counselors, improve access to services for Veterans, and ensure a wider range of qualified professionals who can support Veterans in their educational and career goals.

VA supports this bill. However, VA suggests changing the reference to "educational and vocational counseling" to "benefits counseling" in 38 U.S.C. § 3697B(a) and in this statute's title. These changes would expand the pool of qualified individuals who VA may recruit for the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program to

perform work that VSOC counselors already conduct, such as conducting outreach, assisting with applications for benefits, and coordinating on-campus services.

A cost estimate is not currently available.

H.R. XXXX "Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2025"

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3301(1)(B) to expand eligibility criteria for those who are on active duty to include active-duty service as defined in 10 U.S.C. § 101(d), inactive-duty training as defined in 10 U.S.C. § 101(d), or annual training duty. Under 10 U.S.C. § 101(d), the term "active duty" is defined as those individuals who are on full-time duty in the active military service of the United States including full-time training duty, annual training duty, and attendance, while in the active military service, at a school designated as a service school by law or by the Secretary of the military department concerned.

The proposed legislation would also amend 38 U.S.C. § 3301(1)(C) by expanding the eligibility criteria for those with active-duty service as a member of the Army National Guard or Air National Guard. Currently, such individuals are limited to those with service described in section 3301(1)(C) with full-time service: (i) in the National Guard of a state for the purpose of organizing, administering, recruiting, instructing, or training the National Guard, or (ii) in the National Guard under 32 U.S.C. § 502(f) when authorized by the President or the Secretary of Defense for the purpose of responding to a national emergency. The amendment would now define "active duty" to include: (i) full-time service in the National Guard of a state for the purpose of organizing, administering, recruiting, instructing, or training the National Guard; (ii) full-time service in the National Guard when performing full-time National Guard duty as defined in 32 U.S.C. § 101, which includes the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard; and (iii) full-time service in the National Guard when performing active duty, as defined in 32 U.S.C. § 101.

Currently, Guard and Reserve service is only creditable for the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit if its service in very limited circumstances: on active duty under a call or order to active duty under section 688, 12301(a), 12301(d), 12301(g), 12301(h), 12302, 12304, 12304a, or 12304b of title 10 or section 712 of title 14; or in the case of a member of the Army National Guard of the United States or Air National Guard of the United States full-time service in the National Guard of a state for the purpose of organizing, administering, recruiting, instructing, or training the National Guard; or in the National Guard under section 502(f) of title 32 when authorized by the President or the Secretary of Defense for the purpose of responding to a national emergency declared by the President and supported by Federal funds.

The proposed legislation would be effective 1 year after the date of enactment. The amendments would apply to service performed on or after September 11, 2001.

Finally, the time limitation under 38 U.S.C. § 3321(a) for using VA education benefits acquired from the expansion of eligibility for Reserve and National Guard members by this bill would apply as if the amendments had been enacted immediately after the enactment of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-252).

VA supports the proposed legislation, subject to the availability of appropriations. However, VA cites concerns with implementation. Specifically, VA has concerns regarding data collection challenges associated with implementing the proposed legislation. VA would need to discuss the additional categories falling under the revised definition of full-time active duty and the sufficiency of data received under the current computer matching agreement for identifying individuals falling within those categories with the Department of Defense (DoD). VA has concerns regarding the availability of DoD data elements corresponding with information technology (IT) systems and adjudication rules; therefore, VA believes that significant collaboration between VA and DoD would be required to facilitate the data exchange needed to adjudicate automated claims. The proposed changes would require VA to make significant changes to the type of data currently exchanged between DoD and VA through the VA/DoD Identity Repository and displayed in the Veterans Information System. Additionally, the Digital GI Bill program would need new rules programmed to calculate eligibility based on the new categories of qualifying active-duty service. Based on the cumulative effect of these changes, VA estimates that it would take 18 to 24 months from enactment of the proposed legislation to make necessary adjustments. Please note, this timeline is contingent on DoD first having the data available, compiled, and complete prior to VA implementing adjudication procedures.

A cost estimate is not currently available.

H.R. XXXX "Reforming Education for Veterans Act"

Currently, members of the Armed Forces (including Reserve Components) who are enrolled in a course of education at an institution of higher learning using VA education benefits and who receive orders to enter active service, inactive duty training, or state active duty can withdraw or take a leave of absence from the course without suffering any adverse action, such as a failing grade or financial penalty.

Section 2 of this bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3691A to add an additional protection that would allow a covered member, after receiving orders to enter a period of covered service, to enter into an agreement with the institution concerned to complete a course of covered education to the satisfaction of the institution. The covered member would be required to have completed at least one-half of the course of covered education.

Section 3 of this bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3693(a) by requiring VA to ensure that any educational institution with multiple campuses is only required to complete one annual compliance survey if one school certifying official (SCO) certifies Veteran

enrollment for all such campuses. This section would also change the timeline for VA or a state approving agency to provide notice to an educational institution before conducting a compliance survey to not more than 15 days for an educational institution with a time stamp database collection feature, and not more than 10 days for any other educational institution. Finally, section 3 of the bill would define the term "school certifying official" as an employee of an educational institution with primary responsibility for certifying Veteran enrollment at the educational institution.

Section 4 of this bill would require VA to notify SCOs of updates to the SCO handbook not later than 14 business days after VA updates the handbook.

VA does not support this bill primarily due to requirements outlined in section 3; however, VA supports section 2 subject to amendment and subject to the availability of appropriations, and VA has no objections to section 4.

VA supports section 2, subject to amendment and subject to the availability of appropriations. While VA supports much of section 2, VA disagrees with the proposed limitation that would require the student to complete at least half of a course of education to be eligible to enter into an agreement with the school. VA believes the school and student should be allowed to enter into an agreement regardless of the amount of the course the student has completed. As such, VA recommends striking proposed section 3691A(d).

VA does not support section 3. Compliance surveys are about more than simply checking that the SCO is keeping adequate records. Therefore, the limitation on surveys based solely on the campuses sharing an SCO for verification of enrollments creates a significant liability that should a campus fail to satisfy approval requirements, the deficiency would go unnoticed. Simply because a program satisfies all approval requirements at one campus, we cannot assume the same program administered by the same school and certified by the same SCO satisfies all approval requirements at a different campus. Approval requirements for educational institutions include adequate facilities, space, and equipment, which must be reviewed at each individual location. Therefore, there can be one campus which has adequate facilities, space, and equipment while a different campus of the same school may lack adequate facilities, space, and equipment. The failures of the campus may not be present at the time of initial approval and may be only discoverable through a compliance survey. For example, the equipment may break or the facilities may fall into disarray due to neglect. A compliance survey is necessary at each campus to make sure programs continue to satisfy approval requirements for the good of our GI Bill beneficiaries regardless of whether the SCO is shared across multiple campuses.

VA has no objection to section 4. However, VA believes this provision should be codified in chapter 36 for reference purposes allowing schools to easily locate this requirement in the future. As drafted, this provision would not be included in the United States Code and should be. It would not be beneficial to require VA and schools to search for this requirement in Public Laws, if enacted.

H.R. XXXX Repayment to Servicemembers of Contributions Made Towards Post-9/11 GI Bill

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3327(f)(3) to remove the timing requirement for VA to refund the $1,200 Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty (MGIB-AD) contribution with the last monthly housing payment under the Post-9/11 GI Bill (PGIB). The current requirement establishes that an individual must be receiving a housing allowance at the time he or she exhausts his or her PGIB entitlement to receive a refund of the MGIB-AD contribution. Under this bill, VA would be allowed to refund the $1,200 contribution at any time prior to an individual exhausting his or her PGIB benefits. The amendment would take effect on August 1, 2025.

VA supports this bill, subject to the availability of appropriations. It would allow certain individuals to receive a refund of their $1,200 MGIB-AD contribution prior to exhausting their PGIB benefits and eliminate confusion regarding the refund of their MGIB-AD contributions.

VA notes, however, that the bill would not remove the language in 38 U.S.C. § 3327(f)(1) that the refund be provided as an increase to the monthly housing allowance (MHA), meaning the earliest VA can refund the $1,200 MGIB-AD contribution is with the first monthly housing payment after the election to receive Chapter 33 benefits. However, some beneficiaries may never be entitled to MHA payments (for example, if they choose to enroll in programs such as flight training where MHA is not authorized, if they only pursue a program at half-time or below, or if they use all PGIB entitlement while on active duty), meaning these beneficiaries would never get their $1,200 refunded. If Congress intends to allow VA to refund the $1,200 MGIB-AD contribution to Veterans who do not receive a monthly housing payment as part of their PGIB benefits, which is possible, or to allow a refund prior to the next monthly housing payment, it should remove this requirement from section 3327(f)(1).

Additionally, such a change would require VA to make significant modifications to its automated adjudication systems. As written, the proposed legislation would require VA to implement the policy change, effective August 1, 2025. However, VA would like to note that the Department would need significant time to implement such IT changes after enactment.

A cost estimate is not currently available.

H.R. XXXX "Veterans Education and Technical Skills Opportunity Act of 2025" ("VETS Opportunity Act of 2025")

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3680A to allow VA, for a quarter, semester, or term beginning on or after August 1, 2025, to approve enrollment of eligible Veterans in an accredited independent study program that leads to a certificate that reflects graduation from a course of study that requires regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors if it is offered by (i) a post-secondary area career and

technical education school, (ii) a post-secondary vocational institution, or (iii) an institution of higher education that is approved to participate or is participating in the student financial assistance programs authorized by title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (title IV). Currently, VA can only approve enrollment of eligible Veterans in an accredited independent study program that leads to a certificate if it is offered by (i) a post-secondary area career and technical education school or (ii) a post-secondary vocational institution.

VA supports this bill, subject to the availability of appropriations. However, VA notes that this bill would affect approval of certain accredited non-college degree programs offered through independent study, but other important and invaluable prerequisite courses for admission into a degree program, such as online remedial courses, would continue to be barred from GI Bill approval. Thus, while the bill would increase training opportunities for Veterans, it perhaps does not go far enough in providing a pathway to GI Bill approval for valuable programs while safeguarding Veterans and beneficiaries from predatory actors. Moreover, because the bill would not require "participation" in a title IV program as a condition for approval, an educational institution that "is approved to participate" but is not "participating in" the program could avoid the additional oversight and protections afforded by the Department of Education.

A cost estimate is not currently available.

H.R. XXXX VR&E Hotline and Outreach

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3104 by requiring VA to establish a telephone number within the Education Call Center for calls about Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) services and requiring regional offices to include a phone number and email address for a VR&E point of contact on their website. This bill would also create a new 38 U.S.C. § 3123 requiring VR&E counselors to attend monthly question-and-answer sessions with SCOs. VR&E counselors would be required to offer in-person briefings about VR&E services to Veterans at schools within 150 miles of each regional office and virtual briefings for schools more than 150 miles from the regional office. Finally, VA would provide a report on extensions of periods of vocational rehabilitation programs, including the number of Veterans requesting an extension, the number of requests approved, and the number of requests rejected. Counselors would also have up to 30 days to determine if an extension could be granted following a Veteran's request.

VA supports this bill, subject to amendment, and subject to the availability of appropriations. VA is dedicated to strengthening communication and access to VR&E services and recognizes the importance of enhancing outreach efforts for Veterans. However, VA has concerns with language throughout the bill that would require a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) to perform activities not directly associated with executing Chapter 31 benefits. In addition, the bill would contain requirements that would be difficult to implement either due to staff turnover or resource availability.

VA supports creating a call center within the Education Call Center specifically for VR&E participants. This would require additional resource allocation to execute the increased service demand of the call center and provide VR&E benefit-specific training to the representatives who answer the calls.

VA supports each regional office publishing a telephone number and email address on its website for Veterans to access information about services. However, VA does not recommend including a name on a public website, as this could pose logistical issues associated with maintaining the website due to turnover and the availability of the specific employee as a single point of contact.

VA supports a monthly question-and-answer session with appropriate SCOs. However, VA recommends amending the bill's language in proposed new section 3123(a) to require a representative from each regional office to participate in the monthly sessions rather than requiring every VRC to do so, which would significantly limit the VRCs' availability to serve Veterans and execute Chapter 31 benefits for Veterans currently enrolled in the program.

VA supports providing informational briefings if the language in proposed section 3123(b) is amended to require "a trained outreach specialist" to provide these briefings rather than requiring every VRC to do so. Without this amendment, the bill would restrict the availability of a counselor to execute Chapter 31 benefits for Veterans currently enrolled in the program. This would significantly increase wait times for services and benefit delivery for Chapter 31 beneficiaries. Outreach would not specifically require a trained VRC to provide the informational briefings. Additional resource and hiring authority for outreach specialists would be required to meet increased in-person briefing requirements.

These proposed amendments would allow VA to utilize appropriate resources for this type of service, which would likely result in an overall cost savings when compared with using vocational counselors to perform these functions. VA remains committed to providing Veterans with high-quality counseling through a combination of in-person and virtual services, ensuring accessibility while maximizing efficiency.

A cost estimate is not currently available.

H.R. XXXX Individualized Vocational Rehabilitation Plans

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3107 by modifying the conditions that must be met for VA and the Veteran to redevelop an individualized written plan of vocational rehabilitation. VA would be required to redevelop a plan if it determines that (i) achievement of the Veteran's long-range rehabilitation goals are no longer feasible due to changes in the Veteran's employment handicap or (ii) achievement of such long-range goals is more likely under a different plan. The bill would continue to authorize VA

to disapprove redevelopment of such plan if VA determines that redevelopment is not appropriate.

VA supports this bill, subject to the availability of appropriations. This bill would provide clarity and remove subjective language, such as requiring VA to redevelop the plan if VA determines that redevelopment "is appropriate." It would delineate the reasons why VA would redevelop a plan to ensure justification and consistency.

A cost estimate is not currently available.

H.R. XXXX "Fair Access to Co-ops for Veterans Act of 2025"

This bill would reauthorize VA to guarantee certain loans for the purchase of stock or membership in a cooperative housing (co-op) corporation and would require VA to prescribe new implementing regulations. It would also require Veterans to pay a fee of 3.25% of the total loan amount for any co-op loan, including an assumption of a co-op loan, in addition to the standard statutory loan fee.

VA does not support this bill. Section 2(a) of the bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3710(a)(12) to reauthorize VA to guarantee co-op loans. It would constitute a reauthorization because the initial authority expired in 2011. New implementing regulations would also be required, but section 2(f) would authorize VA to issue implementing guidance in advance of regulation. Section 2(b) of the bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3729(b) to add a second funding fee to be paid by a Veteran who obtains or assumes a co-op loan, and section 2(c) would ensure that VA could guarantee a co-op loan for more than $144,000. Section 2(d) would amend 38 U.S.C. §§ 3704(c) and 3714 to require VA to treat the shares in a co-op as residential property, and section 2(e) would authorize VA to advertise the availability of co-op loans.

The reason for VA's lack of support of the bill is rooted in the numerous differences between loans to purchase co-op shares and the more traditional home loans that VA guarantees. Where the traditional loan usually involves the purchase of a residential unit, including an interest in land, a Veteran seeking to live in a co-op buys stock or shares of the co-op's corporation. VA believes the differences would create challenges for Veterans and other stakeholders, risks for taxpayers, and concerns for VA that the bill could not be implemented as drafted.

Although co-op housing provides a viable housing alternative in certain markets, the unique co-op housing framework is not in wide demand, and VA fears it would raise significant cost obstacles for most Veterans. Many residential co-ops require down payments or cash reserves to join, and when factoring in rising co-op prices, lower volume, higher interest rates, and the 3.25% funding fee on top of the standard funding fee a Veteran would pay for a VA-guaranteed loan, the cost of co-op loans could prove prohibitive.

State-specific classifications of co-ops can also lead to extra cost burdens for Veterans. Although the bill would amend sections 3704(c)(3) and 3714(i) to classify the shares as residential property for VA purposes, the new amendments would not pre-empt state laws. New York and Florida, for example, treat co-ops as personal property because buyers acquire shares in a corporation, receive a proprietary lease for their unit, and do not own the real estate directly. The state-specific laws can result in legal and administrative expenses, both upfront and ongoing, that do not arise in connection with more traditional types of home ownership.

In addition to cost obstacles Veterans could face, they may have difficulties finding lenders willing to make co-op loans in VA's program, for two reasons. First, originating co-op loans require lenders to have more specialized expertise and to take on significantly more risk than with traditional home loans. Given the low volume VA would expect in VA's program—VA did not guarantee any co-op loans during the 5-year trial period that ended in 2011—lenders may simply find it too costly or too risky, or both, to participate. Second, and perhaps more influential in lenders' possible unwillingness to participate, is that the degree of secondary investor interest in VA-guaranteed co-op loans remains largely unknown, if not suspect. Cashflows for lenders originating VA-guaranteed loans generally derive from investors in mortgage-backed securities (MBS). The Government National Mortgage Association (Ginnie Mae) is the principal entity that pools VA-guaranteed loans into MBS, and it is not clear whether Ginnie Mae would accept VA co-op loans into their MBS. Thus, without a clear investment vehicle for the loans, and given the complexities inherent to co-op lending in the first place, VA believes Veterans could struggle to find a co-op loan product that would work for them.

Another challenge Veterans could face is a co-op corporation's default on the corporation's obligations. If, for instance, there is a lien against an underlying co-op building project, the shareholders take their shares subject to the outstanding corporate lien. The subordinate position jeopardizes the security of the shares, though, because the shares remain subject to the risk of corporate insolvency and foreclosure of the overall co-op building project. Notably, this is yet another reason why some lenders are unwilling to make co-op loans, as lenders must be able to evaluate and monitor the financial well-being of the corporation, and they must subordinate their own loans to the corporation's obligations. VA notes the subordination of a VA-guaranteed loan would not seem to clearly satisfy the lien priority requirements of current section 3703(d)(3)(A), which requires that "[a]ny real estate housing loan (other than for repairs, alterations, or improvements) shall be secured by a first lien on the realty."

The challenges would not be limited to Veterans, however. The unique structure of co-ops would also place taxpayers and VA at risk. For example, the foreclosure of a co-op building project would, if the Veteran shareholder lost the right to the shares as a result, almost undoubtedly lead to VA having to make good on the guaranty. In other words, VA would have to pay a guaranty claim, not because the Veteran defaulted, but because the corporation did. Also, VA is uncertain how the liquidation, possession, and resale of the fractional corporate shares would fit within the prescribed procedures on

default within current section 3732 (giving holders the legal option to convey the foreclosed property to VA), leaving it questionable whether VA would be able to realize any investment if VA were to acquire the property. Furthermore, at a more fundamental level, VA does not support the concept of the Secretary, an Officer of the United States, becoming a shareholder in co-op housing projects as this could lead to conflicts with that role.

Finally, VA is concerned that the bill would fail to address the expertise and resources VA would need for implementation. VA has not had authority to guarantee co-op loans for over a decade. That fact, coupled with substantial changes in the housing market since 2011, means VA is not equipped with personnel who possess the experience and knowledge to provide the highest quality service that Veterans, other stakeholders, and even VA itself expect of the agency. Additionally, this bill would provide no funding to rectify this issue, essentially making it an unfunded mandate. Thus, VA believes the agency would not be able to succeed in implementing the bill, and this failure would come at the expense of Veterans, taxpayers, and VA's already limited resources.

H.R. XXXX VA Home Loan Program Reform Act

This unnumbered bill would authorize VA to take certain actions to help Veterans who default on a VA-guaranteed loan, including clarifying VA's authority to purchase defaulted guaranteed loans. It would also require VA to prescribe loss mitigation procedures, establish a partial claim program, and report to Congress, not later than 90 days after enactment of the Act, on VA's strategy to ensure that a Veteran who seeks to purchase a home with a VA-guaranteed loan is not at a disadvantage when attempting to secure representation by a real estate agent or broker.

The Department is still examining the legislation and is unable to provide comprehensive views at this time.

H.R. XXXX VA Servicing Purchase Limitation

This bill would limit VA's loan purchases to 250 loans per fiscal year and require VA to report on a plan to sell acquired loans to the private sector.

The Department is still examining the legislation and is unable to provide comprehensive views at this time.

H.R. XXXX "Automotive Support Services to Insure Safe Transportation Act of 2025" ("ASSIST Act of 2025")

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 1701(6)(I), which generally defines, among medical services VA is authorized or required to furnish, automotive adaptations. Current law includes the provision of medically necessary van lifts, raised doors, raised roofs, air conditioning, and wheelchair tiedowns for passenger use. The bill would

amend this authority to include the provision of any medically necessary automobile adaptations, including ramp and kneeling systems, raised doors or lowered floors, raised roofs, air conditioning, mobility device lifts, non-articulating trailers, ingress or egress accessibility modifications, and wheelchair tiedowns.

VA supports, subject to amendments, subject to the availability of appropriations. VA supports these proposed amendments, except for the inclusion of non-articulating trailers. If the language omitted non-articulating trailers, it would largely match with current VA policy (except for kneeling systems, which VA can currently prescribe but not actually provide) and would address concerns VA has identified with the current statutory language, which was enacted in section 22 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333). VA's concern is that the current statutory language is too narrow and does not provide VA clear authority to furnish other necessary adaptations, such as ramp and kneeling systems, lowered floors, and ingress and egress accessibility modifications more generally. The current statute also refers only to wheelchair tiedowns "for passenger use." It does not include tiedowns for the driver's use. By modifying the language to refer more broadly to "any medically necessary automobile adaptations," it also leaves VA room to include additional adaptations as they are developed and proven to be safe and appropriate for use.

VA does not support including non-articulating trailers within the definition of medical services and medically necessary automobile adaptations. The bill would define "automobile adaptations," and the rest of the services listed do modify or alter the vehicle itself. Trailers, however, are separate conveyances that are attached to the vehicle, often by a trailer hitch mounted to the vehicle. They are commercially-available vehicles that are fully removable from a vehicle, and which require no modification or alteration to the vehicle. As a separate conveyance, rather than a modification or alteration to a vehicle, trailers as a class of motor vehicle also raise independent safety concerns that must be weighed against the benefits of transporting items. The Department of Transportation's national Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is the United States' Government agency responsible for developing and enforcing automobile safety standards under United States Code title 49 and its implementing regulations. Consequently, VA refers to NHTSA and its expertise in developing and enforcing safety standards as established in regulation and considers it prudent to use NHTSA's established definitions to ensure that equipment and installations meet appropriate quality standards. NHTSA defines a trailer in 49 C.F.R. 571.3 to mean "a motor vehicle with or without motive power, designed for carrying persons or property and for being drawn by another motor vehicle."

We do note that Congress has already included non-articulating trailers under the automobile adaptive equipment (AAE) program by amending 38 U.S.C. § 3901(2) through section 20 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-333). VA's AAE program is a benefit program, by which eligible Veterans receive needed adaptive equipment for their vehicles to permit safe access to and from the vehicle and safe operation. VA first conducts a clinical evaluation of the Veteran, and the Veteran undergoes extensive training to ensure the Veteran can safely enter,

exit, and operate the vehicle. NHTSA has authority to prescribe safety standards applicable to new motor vehicles and new items of motor vehicle equipment. VA is unaware of new guidance from NHTSA concerning non-articulating trailers and is open to discuss with NHTSA if information becomes available. Eligibility for the AAE program under chapter 39 generally is narrower than eligibility for medical services under chapter 17, so including non-articulating trailers under the definition of medical services would significantly increase costs to VA without a clear benefit to Veterans.

VA is working on a cost estimate for the provision of kneeling systems.

H.R. XXXX Simplifying Veterans Assistance Act of 2025

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 2011(e), which generally establishes application requirements for entities seeking grants from VA's Homeless Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program. The amended language would require VA to make publicly available, on an appropriate VA website, guidance and best practices for entities seeking grants under this section. It would also require VA, after the announcement of a notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) and before the application deadline, to offer at least two online information sessions for entities seeking grants. Each information session would have to last for at least 1 hour, include the opportunity for participants to ask questions about the grant application process, include an explanation of the specific language in the grant application, and provide information about other sources of information about such grants and assistance in applying for such grants.

VA supports with amendments, subject to the availability of appropriations, and has already incorporated many of the requirements this bill would establish.

The requirement to conduct at least two sessions that last for at least 1 hour is also overly prescriptive, as there may not be sufficient demand or interest to warrant dedicating an hour or more of VA staff time on two separate occasions. VA recommends providing the Secretary discretion to cancel an information session if there is insufficient demand or interest.

VA currently maintains two websites with information that includes guidance and best practices on the GPD program (https://www.va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp and https://www.va.gov/homeless/gpd_providerwebsite.asp). VA also maintains several email addresses that are prominently displayed to respond to questions about the GPD program in general, fiscal questions, and questions about Standard Form 425. VA's 2024 NOFO also provides one of these email addresses and notes that requests for technical assistance can be submitted by email, with responses provided within 3 business days. These current efforts seem more accessible to providers than a single 1-hour window during an information session. VA's NOFOs typically include much of the same information from year to year, and many of the awardees are the same from year to year. Additionally, VA tracks requests for technical assistance after each grant announcement and tailors future cycles accordingly.

VA does not have a cost estimate for this bill.

H.R. XXXX "End Veteran Homelessness Act of 2025"

Section 2(a) of this bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 2003(b) to clarify that the number of case managers in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) must be sufficient to ensure that every Veteran who is provided a housing voucher through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-VA Supportive Housing (VASH) program and who is determined to require case management is assigned to a case manager. It would also require VA, in assigning case managers and providing services under section 2003(b), to prioritize vulnerable homeless Veterans, including Veterans who are homeless and who have disabilities (including chronic mental illness, substance abuse disorders, or physical disabilities).

Section 2(b) would require VA, in coordination with HUD, to submit an annual report to Congress on the HUD-VASH program, which would have to include detailed information on Veterans and VHA case managers, as well as the program itself.

VA cites concerns with this bill. VA strongly agrees with the need to solve Veteran homelessness, and VA is exploring all options to address Veteran homelessness. Section 2(a) would amend requirements for VA and HUD in the administration of the HUD-VASH program. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Committee to discuss how VA and Congress can work together to further reduce and eliminate Veteran homelessness.

Section 3 would make several amendments to 42 U.S.C. § 1437f(o)(19), the core authority for the HUD-VASH program. First, it would rescind the outdated cap on the number of vouchers that could be provided in FYs 2007-2011. Second, it would remove the requirements that a participating Veteran has and agree to continued treatment of a chronic mental illness or chronic substance use disorder. Third, it would clarify that Veterans who are at risk of homelessness, and those receiving assistance under another housing assistance program if a HUD-VASH voucher would be more appropriate, would be eligible for this program. Fourth, it would require VA to provide case management to Veterans who are determined (by qualified employees or entities that participate in a centralized or coordinated HUD entry system) to require case management, but Veterans could refuse case management. For those Veterans, VA would have to make recurring attempts to engage and build a relationship with the Veteran to provide case management, solicit feedback, and promote the Veteran's housing stability and opportunities to access health care and other VA benefits and provide case management if the Veteran subsequently requested it. Fifth, neither HUD nor public housing authorities could revoke rental assistance solely based on the refusal of case management. Sixth, if a Veteran's case management was suspended for the health and safety of the Veteran or the case manager, owners could not evict or otherwise penalize the Veteran solely because of the suspension. Seventh, vouchers could be used for Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who do not require case management if such use is included in the notice of operating

requirements for the program. Finally, funds would be authorized to be appropriated for administrative fee payments to public housing authorities for costs of administering vouchers and other eligible expenses (such as security deposit assistance and other costs related to retention and support of participating owners) as defined by notice issued by HUD.

VA cites concerns with section 3 of the bill. As noted above, VA would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Committee to identify new ways to address Veteran homelessness.

VA defers to HUD regarding some of the specific operational elements of this section that HUD would administer, as there may be programmatic issues associated with some of the specific language here.

Section 4 of this bill would require the Comptroller General to submit a report to Congress containing demographic data on the HUD-VASH program and an assessment of various elements of the program.

VA defers to the Comptroller General on section 4 of this bill. Because section 4 would require the Comptroller General to submit a report to Congress, VA defers to the Comptroller General. Section 4 would result in no costs to VA.

VA strongly supports efforts to end Veteran homelessness, and we appreciate Congress' efforts to bolster VA's work in this area. Particularly, we appreciate Congress' enactment of the Housing Oversight and Mitigating Exploitation Act of 2024 (title IV of the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act; P.L. 118-210). While these new authorities are critical, 38 U.S.C. § 2016 must be amended to increase the authorization of appropriations to ensure no Veterans are displaced because of modifications to per diem rate limits.

We further recommend Congress make permanent the appropriations authority due to expire on September 30, 2025. VA proposes to authorize appropriations at the necessary amounts for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program beginning in FY 2026 and in perpetuity. SSVF is an integral component of VA's efforts to reduce and end homelessness among Veterans and has contributed significantly to cutting homelessness among Veterans in half since 2010. Permanent authority supports continuity of these essential services and supports local planning by local communities receiving SSVF funding.

Conclusion

This concludes my statement. We would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.