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501(C)(3) Veterans Non-Profit

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**  
**PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**FOR THE**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
**ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**ON PENDING LEGISLATION**  
**JUNE 11, 2025**

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, 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 legislation being discussed before the subcommittee. 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 acquired a spinal cord injury or disorder (SCI/D). We appreciate the opportunity to share our views on some of the legislation being discussed today.

**H.R. 2791, to increase the maximum amount of housing loan guaranty entitlement available to certain veterans under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs**

PVA supports this bill, which would increase the guaranty amount protected by the VA, allowing veterans to have greater purchasing power when it comes to buying their first home. As we face a housing crisis across the country, veterans need to be able to compete when purchasing a house. By increasing the amount available through VA's home loan program, veterans will have a greater opportunity to buy a suitable residence that meets their needs.

**H.R. 3031, the Gold Star and Surviving Spouse Career Services Act**

The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP), housed within the American Job Centers across the country, is an employment program run by the Department of Labor which is funded through the Jobs for Veterans State Grant Program. The intent of the DVOP is to offer dedicated career assistance to eligible veterans. Many DVOPs currently offer employment support to surviving spouses, but it is not authorized in statute. Congress should do everything it can to reduce the unemployment rate for military spouses, which has exceeded more than 20

percent since 2021.<sup>1</sup> PVA supports codifying the expanded eligibility for DVOP services to surviving spouses and the spouses of currently serving military personnel to better meet their employment needs.

### **H.R. 3481, the Delivering Digitally to Our Veterans Act of 2025**

Getting information to student veterans in a timely manner is critical, and the VA must be able to meet veterans where they are. By authorizing digital communications for GI Bill recipients, student veterans will no longer be reliant on traditional mail service for necessary information. As the VA seeks to modernize benefits delivery, this common-sense legislation will help ensure student veterans are considered and included in those efforts. PVA supports this legislation.

### **Discussion Draft, the Expanding Access for Online Veteran Students Act**

While we appreciate the evolution of education delivery, particularly when it comes to accessibility, raising the Basic Allowance for Housing for student veterans pursuing online education could have dire unintended consequences. Rural communities with institutions of higher learning that have a cost of living lower than the national average would see a drop in enrollment due to this legislation incentivizing online education rather than in person or hybrid programs. This would penalize students in rural communities and discourage students from attending in person, which would have an impact on veteran resource centers and other campus investments. Historically, online education programs have had varying levels of success, and in the early days of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, online programs were a mechanism for predatory schools to take advantage of VA benefits while providing subpar education programs to veterans. Many veterans are still trying to be made whole after predatory schools took their education benefits while producing no meaningful degree or certificate. In terms of online education benefits, restoring those benefits to harmed veterans should be the priority. Consequently, PVA does not support this draft legislation.

### **H.R. 3386, the Streamlining the Solid Start Communications Act**

The Solid Start Program has been a valuable addition to the outreach and engagement mechanisms that VA uses to reach out to veterans; however, it is currently limited to tailored mailings. PVA supports the Streamlining the Solid Start Communications Act, which would allow VA to conduct outreach via text messaging, virtual chat features, and other forms of electronic engagement.

### **H.R. 3579, the Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act**

PVA is generally supportive of the Veterans Readiness and Employment Program Integrity Act, but we believe it could be strengthened by modifying some of its provisions. While we appreciate the intent of section two of this legislation, some veterans may struggle with their application because of the service-connected disability that has made them eligible for Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) enrollment. Requiring these veterans to complete the application to receive assistance seems burdensome. However, application assistance

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<sup>1</sup> [Military Spouses Factsheet](#).

should not be the responsibility of the veteran rehabilitation counselor (VRC), this could be done by a veteran rehabilitation specialist, staff who support VRCs in some of their administrative work.

We also believe that section three of the bill fails to recognize that every veteran has unique needs that must be addressed before they are able to find meaningful and sustained employment. Placing an arbitrary cap on the length of time a veteran should be able to find employment discounts the experiences of disabled veterans. There is no established timeline for veterans reengaging with the workforce and limiting their ability to work with a counselor to find suitable employment is an unnecessary barrier that could cause direct harm to catastrophically disabled veterans.

Finally, while the Veterans Benefits Administration Annual Benefits Report contains a lot of good information about the VR&E program, it still leaves a lot of gaps. Some type of VR&E specific annual report would be helpful to the VA, Congress, and stakeholders who engage with the program. PVA believes the roll out of the new VR&E platform, the Readiness and Employment System, should make this type of report easier to produce.

#### **Discussion Draft, the Heroes Owning & Materializing Equity Act of 2025**

PVA supports this draft legislation but offers recommendations to improve it. We strongly support section two of the bill, which seeks to increase a borrower's understanding of and financial responsibility for using a VA home loan. However, we have concerns about the database that would be created under section three of the bill, because we believe it could be difficult to establish and maintain it. Although we support increasing access to adapted houses, such a database would need to provide in depth information about the modifications made to the home. Also, it appears that the database would only be available to other veterans who are eligible for VA's adaptive housing programs. Would purchasing a home on the database affect a veteran's eligibility for any other modifications needed? Would VA ensure that the adaptations meet the veteran's needs? Further clarifications regarding the nature of the database and its use would improve the bill. Finally, we support section four of the bill, which requires the VA to improve outreach efforts to veterans who reside in territories regarding eligibility for VA programs and services.

#### **Discussion Draft, to limit the amount of time the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs may extend the period of a vocational rehabilitation program for a veteran**

Every veteran who uses the VR&E program is unique and has their own individual barriers to employment. When a veteran is identified as having a serious employment handicap, program extensions can be made available on a case-by-case basis. We agree that reasonable limits should be placed on program participation, but placing a blanket cap on its use is not the right solution.

In a December 2024 VR&E oversight hearing, the VA testified that, "an extension may be granted to a Veteran with an Employment Handicap if the Veteran previously completed training an occupational field, but the Veteran's service-connected disability (or disabilities) have worsened to the point that the previous occupation

is no longer suitable. For a Veteran who has been determined to have a Serious Employment Handicap, an extension may be granted to enable the Veteran to complete a period of rehabilitation to the point of employability. These are the majority of reasons extensions are granted.”<sup>2</sup>

There is no way to determine how long a veteran may, or may not, need VR&E support. An arbitrary cap would do little more than limit participation, and it could potentially harm veterans who need to return to the program after a period of successful employment if that veteran’s disabilities have worsened. Therefore, PVA cannot support this draft legislation.

### **H.R. 1965, the Veterans Education Assistance Adjustment Act**

Although the Post-9/11 GI Bill has expanded education opportunities for servicemembers and veterans, ancillary benefits offered through the GI Bill have not increased since 2008. Currently, the book stipend authorized under Chapter 33 falls well short of what is needed to cover the costs of books that a student veteran is expected to purchase annually as part of their education curriculum. Increasing the stipend amount to \$1,400 and tying it to the consumer price index, ensures current and future student veterans will receive the support they need.

### **H.R. 2720, the Gold Star Family Education Parity Act**

This legislation would sunset the Chapter 35, Dependents and Educational Assistance (DEA) program, by August 1, 2029, and would allow the eligible dependents and survivors to access the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) for their education benefits. Currently, DEA benefits are available to dependents and survivors of a veteran who:

- is permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability, or
- died because of a service-connected disability, or
- died in the line of duty, or
- is missing in action or was captured in the line of duty by a hostile force for more than 90 days, or
- was forcibly detained (held) or interned in the line of duty by a foreign entity for more than 90 days, or
- is in the hospital or getting outpatient treatment for a service-connected permanent and total disability and is likely to be discharged for that disability.

Chapter 35 benefits consist of a monthly payment to help students cover some of the costs while participating in college courses, on-the-job training, or an apprenticeship. Meanwhile, Chapter 33 benefits consist of direct payments of tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance, and money for books and supplies. In general, Chapter 33 is the more generous benefit.

Military families, survivors, and dependents of seriously disabled veterans have numerous obstacles to employment and educational opportunities. Many of them had to take on caregiver roles that usurped their

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<sup>2</sup> [Testimony of Nicholas Pamperin, Executive Director, Veteran Readiness and Employment, Veterans Benefits Administration, Testimony, December 11, 2024.](#)

higher education ambitions. PVA supports this legislation, which would give greater educational support to survivors and dependents of seriously disabled veterans to help improve their economic outlook.

#### **H.R. 2954, the Veterans' Transition to Trucking Act of 2025**

PVA supports the Veterans' Transition to Trucking Act, which would improve the GI Bill apprenticeship approval process by allowing interstate commercial carriers to receive a single approval from the VA. Currently, approvals need to be granted for each state. This creates complications for veterans seeking training to join the trucking industry.

#### **H.R. 2034, the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship Opportunity Act**

The Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship was established to give students using VA education benefits additional time when pursuing degrees in various science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields due to the nature of graduation requirements for these rigorous degrees. This legislation removes several barriers that could increase participation rates for the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship by reducing the number of required credits from 60 to 45 and eliminating the requirement that an applicant must have exhausted their Post-9/11 GI Bill. By eliminating these barriers, more students will be eligible to apply for the scholarship and be better prepared to plan for their educational future. Eligibility will still be determined by VA, but removing these requirements should increase the number of applicants. PVA supports this bill.

#### **Discussion Draft, Every Veteran Housed Act**

Preventing veteran homelessness remains a critical challenge, and Congress should give the VA as many tools as it can to reduce the number of homeless veterans. This draft legislation expands the eligibility for homelessness benefits to include veterans discharged under other than dishonorable conditions, despite their time in service. It would also include all branches of the uniformed services. Servicemembers are separated from the military for a myriad of reasons, and we should not ignore the needs of these individuals. Expanding eligibility to homelessness support programs and allowing these veterans to access these critical services will not only help prevent chronic homelessness for these individuals, but it will also take us a step closer to eliminating homelessness for all veterans.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views on some of the legislation before the subcommittee today. We look forward to working with you on the bills discussed and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

### **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 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.

#### ***Fiscal Year 2022***

Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events — Grant to support rehabilitation sports activities — \$ 437,745.

### **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.