
501(C)(3) Veterans Non-Profit

**STATEMENT OF JULIE HOWELL
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PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA
FOR THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
PENDING LEGISLATION
JANUARY 21, 2026**

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Pappas, and members of the subcommittee, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) appreciate the opportunity to share our views on some of the legislation before the subcommittee today. PVA members – veterans who have incurred a spinal cord injury or disorder (SCI/D), experience the breadth of VA care and benefits in unique ways due to their injuries and illnesses. We welcome the chance to show how some of this legislation may impact our members.

H.R. 982, the Warriors to Workforce Act

The Warriors to Workforce Act would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3313(g)(3)(B) by increasing the monthly housing allowance (MHA) for full-time apprenticeships and other on the job training (OJT) programs for student veterans using their Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Currently, when a veteran is using their Post-9/11 GI Bill for an apprenticeship, they are paid 100 percent of the MHA rate for the first six months of their program. The second six months is paid out at 80 percent of the full MHA rate for the locality. During the first six months of the second year of their apprenticeship a veteran receives 60 percent of the MHA rate and the last six months of a two-year program is paid out at 40 percent of the MHA rate.

The Warriors to Workforce Act would increase the amount of MHA paid to a veteran from 80 percent to 90 percent during the second half of their first year of an apprenticeship. PVA has no objections to the increase; however, the drop from 90 percent to 60 percent in the first six months of the second year of a program will be an even bigger financial hit on those veterans. Thus, we think the bill could go farther.

OJT program data shared by the committee last year shows high dropout rates. Apprenticeships see a 44 percent dropout rate between steps two and three, and OJT programs see a 56 percent dropout rate. Further, an article published by Urban Wire in 2021 discusses how the GI Bill underserves apprenticeships.¹ Less than one percent of GI Bill recipients use their educational benefit for apprenticeships or OJT programs, and we believe the VA should do more to raise awareness of the non-traditional education paths available through the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Veterans choosing to enroll in an apprenticeship program or OJT programs should not be penalized for their decision to bypass enrollment in traditional higher education programs; thus, we suggest amending the language within the bill to authorize the full MHA rate for up to two years as a veteran participates in apprenticeship or OJT programs. Additionally, employers should not be able to adjust the participant's pay because of that allowance. Until VA exercises greater oversight for approved apprenticeship programs and takes steps to ensure that employers are increasing compensation in coordination with increased and improved skills, veterans are going to continue to enroll in institutions of higher learning rather than apprenticeship programs.

Raising awareness, coupled with an increase in MHA rates for apprenticeships and other OJT programs, could improve opportunities, particularly for PVA members. Significant barriers to employment exist for veterans with catastrophic disabilities and offering non-traditional education and employment opportunities for those that are seeking them should be prioritized by VA education service.

H.R. 2878, the Daniel J. Harvey, Jr. and Adam Lambert Improving Servicemember Transition to Reduce Veteran Suicide Act

PVA supports this legislation, which seeks to strengthen 10 U.S.C. § 1142(b) and 38 U.S.C. § 6320(b)(1) by including more robust language around mental health services provided by the Secretary of Defense through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the VA Secretary through the Solid Start Program.

Ensuring that transitioning servicemembers and veterans are aware of services and supports offered by the VA is critical in the health and wellbeing of our nation's veterans. Information about the vast mental health resources provided by the VA should be disseminated to the greatest degree possible.

We want to take this opportunity to remind Congress that not all servicemembers receive a traditional TAP experience. Servicemembers who are separated due to illness or injury are often placed in a Wounded Warrior Platoon or another transition-focused unit. This bill could be improved by including language directing the Department of Defense to ensure these individuals receive this critical information.

H.R. 4105, the VET Act of 2025

This bill directs the Department of Labor (DOL) to create a grant program to hire more military-affiliated people in the energy sector. Access to this program would be limited to servicemembers who have a military occupational specialty, training, or experience related to energy production,

¹ [The Post-9/11 GI Bill Underserves Apprentices, April 27, 2021.](#)

construction, or manufacturing, as well as service-connected veterans and homeless veterans or veterans facing significant barriers to employment. Creating an additional DOL grant program for a specific sector to incentivize veteran employment seems redundant. Instead, PVA would support additional funding to allow the department to direct existing efforts to address the needs of this sector.

H.R. 5436, to prohibit an educational institution from withholding a transcript from an individual who pursued a course or program of education at such institution using Post-9/11 educational assistance

Regulatory changes that went into effect for the Department of Education in July of 2024 established that institutions of higher education could no longer withhold a student's transcript or take other negative actions against a student due to an error on the school's part, if that student was receiving title IV funds. Transcript withholding as a means of debt collection is a customary practice in the education sector, but for many veterans, the outstanding debt is often disputed, making it a complicated issue. PVA supports this bill which would create parity for students using VA education benefits by prohibiting a school from withholding a student's transcript due to outstanding institutional charges. PVA supports this legislation.

H.R. 5634, the Veterans Flight Training Responsibility Act of 2025

This bill would amend 38 U.S.C. § 3313 by adding subsection (m) and establishing a maximum total cost ceiling of \$100,000 for flight training for an individual at a public institution, which would bring them in line with the limits on non-degree flight training programs at private institutions. There is currently no ceiling for flight training programs when those programs lead to a degree despite there being limits for other programs at institutions of higher learning. PVA supports this legislation, which caps the amount available for flight training and ties the amount to the consumer price index.

Discussion Draft, the CRUISE Act

VA's Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program prescribes and pays for adaptive equipment to allow eligible veterans to safely operate and enter/exit their vehicles. Many of these adaptations are done by dealers outside of the VA and reimbursements for their work are processed by the individual VA medical centers (VAMC). Many PVA members and the dealerships that serve them have complained of late payments by a few VAMCs. This has caused some of the smaller dealerships considerable financial hardship and discouraged others from working with the department. Because the AAE programs are run by the individual VAMCs, there is no uniformity in the processing time across the nation.

As written, this draft bill requires VA to centralize the process for making AAE payments at VA Central Office and directs the department to track and resolve payments that are more than 90 days overdue. PVA strongly supports the intent of this draft legislation but believes it could be improved. Specifically, we would like to see language providing more information on how the centralization of the process should be conducted. We would be happy to work with the bill's sponsor to develop appropriate language. The AAE program is extremely important to paralyzed veterans all over the nation and a mistake in this process could prove to be catastrophic.

Discussion Draft, the Improving Mental Health Care and Coordination for Homeless Veterans Act

PVA supports this draft bill. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive 1501 established the VHA Homeless Programs in 2016 and the changes proposed by this legislation would codify internal improvements that the VA and Congress have made over the years, ensuring that advances made in combating veteran homelessness are not forgotten.

Section (a)(1) and (2) of the legislation describes the assessment process and directs VA to identify the physical needs of a veteran and create a plan to address them. It is critical to note that veterans who are experiencing homelessness, and living with an SCI/D, may need to be referred to a VA SCI/D center to assess their health status and ensure there are no serious health concerns. To be successful, implementation of this legislation would need to consider the situations of all veterans who may be experiencing homelessness.

Discussion Draft, the Improving Emerging Tech Opportunities for Veterans Act

This draft legislation seeks to add “emerging technology” to 38 U.S.C. § 3699C. The Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (P.L. 118-210) reauthorized the Veterans Affairs High Technology Program, or Vet Tech. VA has not provided any data about the Vet Tech program to stakeholders in more than a year, so we have no insight into current enrollment or impact of the reauthorization. PVA defers to the VA regarding whether this legislation is necessary, because it is our understanding that the department is already counting the programs listed within the draft text in their eligible program lists for Vet Tech enrollment.

Discussion Draft, the Affordable Housing Guarantee Act

PVA has concerns with this draft legislation, which seeks to increase the amount covered by the VA home loan program to 50 percent, up from 25 percent of the loan amount. This legislation would benefit the mortgage industry by providing an additional 25 percent of coverage in the event of a foreclosure. PVA shares concerns voiced by Chairman Van Orden in a February 2024 subcommittee hearing where he expressed apprehensions about the amount of debt covered by the VA when it comes to home loans and the financial burden assumed by the department in the event of a foreclosure.

The VA Home Loan Program Reform Act became law about six months ago and we are still waiting for the VA to roll out the partial claims program (PCP). PVA believes we should wait until we have data from VA about the impact of the PCP before adjusting the guaranteed amount offered by the VA.

Discussion Draft, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a quarterly report on housing loans insured, guaranteed, or under laws administered by the Secretary

In recent months, there has been a lot of media coverage around veteran foreclosures. Any data the VA could provide to Congress that leads to informed decisions on preventative measures to avoid veteran foreclosures would be helpful to addressing this concern. Since the VA home loan guarantee program tracks this data throughout the year, PVA does not foresee additional administrative burden on the VA.

Discussion Draft, to eliminate the maximum authorizations of appropriations for certain benefits for homeless veterans administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and to make permanent the authority of the Secretary to carry out certain programs for homeless veterans

Services and supports for homeless veterans have greatly improved over the past several years thanks to higher Grant and Per Diem (GPD) rates approved by Congress and more robust, wrap-around services offered by VA. However, recent complications experienced in implementing increased GPD rates shines light on a concern that this bill seeks to address.

By removing the authorization for appropriation amounts, the VA will be better positioned to ask for the resources really needed to support vulnerable groups of veterans. Congress and the VA should do everything possible to guarantee smooth delivery of services and supports to veterans regardless of fights happening in Washington D.C. Permanently authorizing these programs shields them from future funding lapses; thus, PVA supports this legislation.

PVA is grateful for the opportunity to share our views on some of the legislation before the subcommittee today. We look forward to working with Congress on these bills and we welcome 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.