



Paralyzed Veterans
of America

WASHINGTON UPDATE

Recent news regarding legislation and regulatory actions affecting veterans and people with disabilities.

Written and produced by Paralyzed Veterans of America - Government Relations Department

July 17, 2020

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PVA's ADA 30 WEBINAR

In honor of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), PVA will host a webinar exploring PVA's role in the passage of the ADA, ongoing advocacy efforts to remove barriers, and new accessibility frontiers. We will also have a panel of PVA members who will share their ADA experiences. This webinar will be recorded.

When: July 23, 2020 02:00 PM ET

Topic: ADA 30: Celebrating Access, Highlighting Remaining Barriers

Register in advance for this webinar: https://pva.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_KpV4UdkkQ-yyKUI55VASIq

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

UPDATE ON SPECIALLY ADAPTIVE HOUSING LEGISLATION (H.R. 3504)

The Senate amended and approved in late March H.R. 3504, which increases the amount of the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant to better match current construction costs, establishes a supplementary grant for veterans who need it, and allows veterans more opportunities to draw from the grant funds to accommodate moving and life changes. PVA has been working aggressively to get the House to advance this bill to the President. Our sources tell us the constant pressure is showing results. Through our new grassroots system, VoterVoice, you can send a pre-drafted letter on this subject directly to your U.S Representative. If you have not contacted your representative, please click [here](#).

HEARING ON RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND BUILDING A RESILIENT VETERANS HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE

On July 1, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing on Recruitment, Retention and Building a Resilient Veterans Health Care Workforce. Dr. Steven L. Lieberman, M.D., Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) was the key witness.

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According to Dr. Lieberman, during the COVID-19 pandemic, VHA has hired new staff and redistributed current staff across the system to areas of greatest need. Between March 29 and mid-June 2020, VHA hired more than 20,000 employees including over 3,800 RNs, 250 Nurse Practitioners, and more than 1,000 Nursing Assistants. Approximately 85 percent of the new hires have been hired on as permanent appointments. VA also has the option to convert some of the remaining 15 percent of new hires to permanent positions.

The hiring surge resulted in a net onboard increase of 2.2 percent since the start of fiscal year (FY) 2020 (8,020 net gain), more than half of which occurred since the COVID-19 hiring surge began (4,900 net gain). Nurses have grown at even higher rate of 2.7 percent since the start of FY 2020 (2,820 net gain).

VA FUNDING BILL CLEARS KEY COMMITTEE

The House Appropriations Committee recently approved its version of the [fiscal year \(FY\) 2021 Military Construction, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies \(MILCON/VA\) spending bill](#) by a vote of 30-20 on July 9. The draft measure provides \$250.9 billion in both discretionary and mandatory funding that includes an extra \$12.5 billion in emergency spending to cover increasing costs of health care through VA's Community Care Network.

Roughly \$90 billion of the bill goes directly toward veterans' medical care: \$10.3 billion of that amount would be provided for mental health care, including \$313 million for suicide prevention outreach; \$661 million would go toward the specific health care needs of women veterans; and \$840 million would go toward Medical and Prosthetic Research. The latter figure would be an increase of \$40 million above the 2020 enacted levels but is \$20 million less than what the *Independent Budget* recommended. The bill also provides \$2.6 billion for VA to continue developing its new Electronic Health Record System as well as continued oversight of the project by the Government Accountability Office.

The Committee allocated roughly \$1.4 billion for VA's major construction projects and \$400 million for minor ones. Another \$3.2 billion was set aside to cover the operating expenses of the Veterans Benefit Administration to ensure the prompt processing of disability claims. Finally, the bill provides advance appropriations for FY 2022 of \$145.3 billion for VA's benefit programs and \$94.2 billion for veterans' medical programs.

Action on this legislation could take place in the House prior to the August recess.

NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- PVA Participates in Hearing on Reproductive Care

On July 1, PVA testified at a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health [hearing](#)

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titled, "Veterans' Access to Reproductive Health Care.: The oral testimony included permanent authorization of in vitro fertilization services; inclusion of surrogacy and gamete donation to assistive reproductive technologies provided by VA; and the importance of asking about sexual health, incontinence, and other topics to veterans with spinal cord injuries or disorders (SCI/D). Our written comments included the need for more research on reproductive health among veterans with SCI/D. Of note, during the hearing, Rep. Michael Levin (D-CA) mentioned a recently introduced infrastructure bill and asked witnesses if issues of physical accessibility of services were widespread.

- Senate Version of Auto Act Introduced

On July 2, Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) introduced S. 4155, which would allow qualified service-connected disabled veterans to receive a grant every ten years towards the purchase of a new vehicle. This legislation is a companion bill to H.R. 5761, which was introduced in the House by Representatives Dan Meuser (R-PA) and Anthony Brindisi (D-NY) in February. Senator Collins' [press release](#) on the bill can be found here; and the video of her floor speech, mentioning PVA member Neal Williams, as she introduced the measure [here](#).

- Prosthetic Benefit Applications

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VA is recommending that all prosthetic benefit applications (Clothing Allowance, Home Improvement and Structural Alterations, and Automobile Adaptive Equipment) be submitted to the local facility by email, fax, or regular mail. At this time, in-person submission or dropping off applications is not recommended.

For clothing allowance applications, the submission deadline is August 1; however, if veterans have extenuating circumstances (such as lack of resources; lack of access to email, fax, or mail; hospitalization) applications should still be submitted by fax, email, or regular mail to their local Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service and will be accepted for an entitlement decision after August 1. However, we cannot stress enough the importance of timely submission of applications as clothing allowance applications are currently being accepted and processed. VA tells us payments for applications processed on or before August 1 will be released by the Veterans Benefits Administration between September 1-October 31. If you have any questions about your eligibility and/or applying for prosthetic benefits, or any other VA benefit, contact your PVA national service officer for assistance.

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- VR&E Renamed

VA has [renamed](#) their Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service to the Vocational Readiness and Employment Program. VA Secretary Wilkie stated, “The new name puts an emphasis on the Veteran and the department’s mission to help them reach their employment goals.”

- David Capozzi Retires as Executive Director of the U.S. Access Board

On June 30, Access Board Executive Director David Capozzi retired after 28 years of service. He joined the agency in 1992 as Director of the Office of Technical and Information Services and became Executive Director in 2008. During his tenure, the Board's mission expanded significantly, and David led the development of new accessibility guidelines and standards in a variety of areas. He also greatly enhanced the Board’s influence both nationally and globally as a leading resource on accessible design and was instrumental in engaging the public and stakeholders in the Board’s rulemaking and other work. Prior to joining the Access Board, Capozzi served as PVA’s National Advocacy Director.

HEARINGS AND ADA EVENTS

- The House Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Social Security will be holding a [hearing](#) on July 17 at 12:00 pm ET titled, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Social Security and its Beneficiaries.” Shaun Castle, Deputy Executive Director, will be testifying on behalf of PVA.
- The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities [invites](#) you to a briefing celebrating the 30th anniversary of the ADA on July 23 from 11:00 am -- 12:00 pm ET. Panelists will discuss key issues that remain of significant concern for the disability community 30 years after the ADA's passage, and offer thoughts on what the future holds for ADA implementation in these areas. The briefing focuses on the intersection of disability and racial equity, and the aim of ensuring that the ADA's goals of full participation, equal opportunity, independent living and economic self-sufficiency can become a reality for all people with disabilities including Black, Indigenous and People of Color.
- Join disability rights leaders, performers, artists, singers, dancers, poets, filmmakers and storytellers with disabilities for ADA30 Lead On: Celebration of Disability Arts, Culture, Education & Pride. The event will be streamed on YouTube and Facebook Live on July 23, from 7:00 – 9:15 pm ET. It is being emceed by Danny Woodburn. [Sign up for free tickets.](#)
- The Access Board will conduct a virtual meeting on July 29 from 1:30 – 3:00 pm ET to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the signing of the ADA into law. The event, which will be open to the public, will focus on how the ADA has reshaped the American landscape and

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the design of facilities and sites, transportation systems, and information and communication technologies. Guest speakers and Board representatives will recall what our world was like before the ADA, review achievements under the ADA in advancing accessible design, and look ahead to new accessibility frontiers, challenges, and solutions over the next 30 years. The Board will provide further details on this event and how to attend on its [website](#) and by email.