



# Washington Update

Check out [PVA's new webpage on caregiving](#) and four new advocacy videos that highlight the [concerns in finding quality home care](#), the [limitations of VA programs](#), and the individual stories of [Anne](#) and [Daniel](#).

## SENATE HEARING ON LONG-TERM CARE WORKFORCE

Recently, the Senate Special Committee on Aging held a hearing focused on staffing shortages among the long-term care workforce. Committee Chairman Bob Casey (D-PA) opened the hearing by stating that between 50 and 90 percent of long-term care settings and providers report significant staffing shortages. He stressed that these shortages lead to facilities being unable to provide critical services, accept new clients, and in some cases, force them to close their doors.

Professionals from the field testified about the need for increased pay and benefits and the impacts of the job, such as employee burn out. They also stressed the need for improved advancement opportunities. There has been increased national attention on the need to grow the long-term care workforce across the country. Veterans with disabilities, including PVA members, have encountered difficulties hiring direct care workers due to low wages and other barriers to accessing care.

You can watch the hearing [here](#).

## HVAC SUBCOMMITTEES HOLD MARKUPS

During the week of April 14, several House Veterans' Affairs (HVAC) subcommittees held markups on pending legislation. The Health Subcommittee moved several

bills supported by PVA on April 16. A few of the bills are H.R. 3225, the BUILD for Veterans Act, which seeks to improve staffing so the VA can improve its management of infrastructure construction; H.R. 6324, the Fiscal Year 2024 VA Major Medical Facility Authorization Act, which authorizes the VA to carry out 11 major medical facility projects; and H.R. 6373, the Veterans STAND Act, which would ensure that SCI/D veterans are offered an annual medical exam, as well as improved communication about the availability of assistive technologies.

That same day, the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee also marked up several PVA-supported bills. A few of those bills are H.R. 1083, the Caring for Survivors Act of 2023, which raises Dependency and Indemnity Compensation rates to meet the 55 percent threshold experienced by survivors of federal employees; H.R. 3651, the Love Lives on Act of 2023, which would ensure survivors retain many benefits from the VA and the Department of Defense if they remarry before the age of 55; H.R. 7150, the Survivor Benefits Delivery Improvement Act of 2024, which would direct the VA to collect demographic data on survivors and develop an outreach program for that population; and H.R. 7777, Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2024, which would increase VA benefits at the same percentage rate as Social Security benefits.



The following day, April 17, the HVAC Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee held its markup of pending legislation. During the markup, the subcommittee considered H.R. 7342, the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2024, a priority for PVA. This legislation which would establish a federal advisory committee on accessibility in the VA.

All of the bills discussed at the subcommittee markups are now eligible for future action by the full committee. More information about the markups is available [here](#).

### DOJ ISSUES UPDATED ADA AND FEDERAL VOTING LAWS GUIDES

On April 18, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced an update to their [Voting and Elections website](#) that provides voting and elections information for voters and state and local elections officials. As part of the update, the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ published two new informational guides on voting rights and updated five other guides. One of the updated guides, [The Americans with Disabilities Act and Other Federal Laws Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities](#), clarifies the right to voter assistance under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and that state laws restricting people from providing assistance with voting, subject to criminal penalties, interfere with voters' rights to assistance under the ADA. The updated guide also clarifies that the ADA prohibits states from categorically disqualifying individuals who have intellectual or mental health disabilities from registering to vote or from voting because of their disability or guardianship status.

### DOJ ENTERS INTO SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT WITH CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

On April 18, the Department of Justice (DOJ) [announced](#) a [settlement agreement](#) with the city of Virginia Beach, Virginia, to resolve its findings that the city was not in compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under the agreement, Virginia Beach will ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal access to public services, including emergency services and the city's website.

Virginia Beach has one of the highest concentrations of veterans in the country, many with service-connected disabilities. Under the agreement, the city agreed to ensure mobile apps comply with WCAG 2.1 Level AA, take corrective actions such as removing physical barriers, solicit accessibility feedback, continue to provide an ADA coordinator, and provide ADA training to city staff.

### DOT RELEASES FINAL RULE ON REFUNDS IN AIR TRAVEL

The Department of Transportation (DOT) recently [released a final rule](#) that aims to make it easier for passengers to obtain refunds when airlines cancel or significantly change their flights, significantly delay their checked bags, or fail to provide the extra services they purchased. PVA commented on DOT's proposed rule to express our concerns about the impact such changes and failures have on passengers with disabilities.

DOT's final rule includes several new protections for passengers with disabilities. Specifically, DOT has determined that there are significant changes that can result in the right to a refund for a passenger with a disability. For instance, an aircraft substitution can result in a refund if it impacts an accessibility feature needed by a passenger with a disability. Travel companions who are on the same reservation can also receive a refund if the passenger with a disability elects to receive a refund rather than fly on the substitute aircraft. Changing a connecting airport also provides the opportunity for a refund. A downgrade in class of service can also have similar results.

You can read the final rule [here](#).

### SSA PUBLISHES FINAL RULE TO EXPAND DEFINITION OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE HOUSEHOLD

On April 19, the Social Security Administration (SSA) [published](#) a final rule, announcing they are finalizing their [proposed rule](#) to expand the definition of a public assistance household to include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as an additional means-tested public income-maintenance (PIM) program. The SSA is also expanding its definition of a public assistance household from a household in which



every member receives some kind of PIM payment to a household that has both an Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicant or recipient, and at least one other household member who receives one or more of the listed PIM payments. Public assistance households are exempt from in-kind support and maintenance (ISM) development and income deeming, two of the most complicated and burdensome features of the SSI program. If determined to be living in a public assistance household, ISM would no longer need to be developed.

In November 2023, PVA signed on to a comment from the Social Security Task Force of the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities, supporting expansion of the definition of a public assistance household and encouraging SSA to expand the definition to include households in which any other member received public assistance. We hope the final rule will ease the burden on people with disabilities who receive SSI.

The final rule will be effective September 30, 2024.

## NEWS OF NOTE

### First MAMMO Act Report Released

Last Congress, PVA championed the Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) Act (P.L. 117-135), which required the VA to examine its capacity to provide preventative mammography screenings to veterans. The first report mandated under the MAMMO Act was released this month by the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG): the [“Comprehensive Healthcare Inspection Program and Care in the Community Report: Mammography Services and Breast Cancer Care.”](#)

The OIG made three recommendations: to increase awareness and education for the Women’s Oncology System of Excellence, a coalition of doctors and experts who assess test results and patient outcomes for improved care; to increase offerings in support of patients diagnosed with breast cancer; and to ensure that the VA Under Secretary for Health works with Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) and facility

leaders to improve data entry into the local cancer registry database in a timely manner.

More reports will be released in the future, including the report on accessible mammography services.

### HASC Releases Quality of Life Report for Service Members

In June 2023, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) created the Quality-of-Life (QoL) Panel to focus on issues impacting U.S. service members and their families. The panel was tasked with creating a report that highlighted the needs of service members and their families during a time when recruitment numbers are not being met. The bipartisan QoL Panel reviewed various aspects of military life and challenges encountered by today’s military.

Earlier this month, after months of hearings, briefings, roundtables, and oversight trips, the [QoL report](#) was released. The report showed serious concerns with lower enlisted pay, food insecurity, inadequate housing payments, problems with accessing childcare, and many other issues.

### Reminder: Comment Period Open for DOT Proposal on Improving the Air Travel Experience for Wheelchair and Scooter Users

**WHO:** PVA needs you to help us keep #PushingAccessForward.

**WHAT:** Send your comments in response to the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (DOT) [proposed changes](#) to the Air Carrier Access Act rules that would improve the air travel experience for wheelchair and scooter users.

**WHEN:** Now until May 13, 2024.

**WHERE:** [Federal Register : Ensuring Safe Accommodations for Air Travelers With Disabilities Using Wheelchairs.](#)

**WHY:** The disability community needs to let the DOT know why better training is needed to stop injuries and

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wheelchair damage, and why you need your assistive device fixed or replaced as soon as possible if it's damaged or lost.

**HOW:** Leave [comments on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking \(NPRM\)](#) and post on social media to share stories about your #Flightmares and why air travel must improve for wheelchair and scooter users.

## WEBINARS & HEARINGS

### Reminder: Advocacy Training Webinars Available

PVA's five-part series, "The 5 W's: The who, what, where, why, and when of our government and the art of advocacy," is available on [PVA.org](#). You can learn more about the Fundamentals of Government, the Legislative Process, Stakeholders of Advocacy, Understanding the Issues and Becoming a Change Agent, and Connecting the Dots. If you have any questions about the series, please contact PVA Grassroots Advocacy Manager Lisa Elijah at [LisaE@PVA.org](mailto:LisaE@PVA.org).

### Upcoming Veterans' Committee Activities

Please visit the [House](#) and [Senate](#) Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on upcoming hearings and markups.