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Washington Update

Follow the Status of PVA's Priority Issues Between Updates! Visit the [PVAction Force](#) page to view our latest alerts and a list of key legislation and its status.

LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO VA HOUSING MODIFICATIONS INTRODUCED

VA's Home and Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grants help veterans and service members make medically necessary improvements and structural alterations to their primary residence. This includes improving the entrance or exit from their homes, restoring their accessibility to the kitchen or bathroom, and making necessary repairs or upgrades to plumbing or electrical systems due to installation of home medical equipment like a dialysis machine.

A lifetime HISA benefit is worth up to \$6,800 for veterans with service-connected conditions rated 50 percent or more disabling (combined) and \$2,000 for veterans who have a non-service-connected condition. These rates have not changed in nearly a dozen years even though the cost of home modifications and labor have risen more than 40 percent during the past 10 years alone. Instead of covering the cost of needed modifications, HISA grants now just "contribute" towards them.

On November 2, Representative Al Lawson (D-FL) and 42 bipartisan cosponsors introduced H.R. 5819, the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act, which would raise HISA rates and tie them to a formula that raises rates annually. Specifically, the legislation would increase the life time grant rate for service-connected veterans to \$10,000 and non-service-connected veterans to \$5,000. It would also tie the grant to the Consumer Price Index to ensure that it better meets the needs of veterans moving forward.

This legislation is one of PVA's priorities and we urge you to [ask your members of Congress to support](#) it.

SOCIAL SECURITY 2100: A SACRED TRUST ACT INTRODUCED

On October 26, the long awaited, revised version of the Social Security 2100 Act was introduced by Chairman of the House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee, John Larson (D-CT), and 193 original cosponsors. Now called the Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust Act, H.R. 5723, the new bill includes many of the critical improvements in Social Security benefits that were contained in the previous version. A Senate companion bill, S. 3071,

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was introduced the same day by Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD). The new version also features additional provisions that would remove a major work disincentive for beneficiaries of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and penalty offsets for recipients of public pensions.

The legislation would establish a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) that better reflects the expenses of older Americans and people with disabilities and a minimum benefit to ensure no one retires into poverty. It would also raise the income thresholds for taxation of Social Security benefits to \$35,000 (single) and \$50,000 (married) and extend the life of the trust funds by four years and close more than half of the program's long-term (75-year) shortfall. In addition, the Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust Act would finally end the five-month waiting period for all those who qualify for SSDI and replace the so-called "cash cliff" with a gradual reduction in benefits. The waiting period imposes severe economic hardship on many beneficiaries and the abrupt termination of SSDI benefits once someone crosses an earnings threshold has been a longstanding work disincentive. Another new provision would repeal benefit offsets in the law that penalize many people who receive retirement income from public service. Over 30 percent of veterans with significant service-connected disabilities work in local, state, or federal positions and often face these pension offsets.

PVA has endorsed the Social Security 2100: A Sacred Trust Act and encourages members to [urge their members of Congress to cosponsor this bill](#).

HOUSE VETERANS' COMMITTEE MARKUP ADDRESSES PVA PRIORITIES

On November 4, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee held a full committee mark up and passed eighteen bills that will provide additional support for veterans. An important bill to advance was the Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2021, H.R. 5607, which passed through the markup procedure with bipartisan support. Three Republicans voted with their Democratic colleagues in advancing this important piece of legislation. Survivors of veterans with ALS are eligible to receive VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). Under current law, a

higher rate of compensation known as the "DIC kicker" can be paid to veterans' survivors who had service-connected disabilities rated as totally disabling for a continuous period of at least eight years immediately preceding their death. The new legislation, if passed, would extend the increased DIC to survivors regardless of how long the veteran lived with ALS. Please [ask your Representatives to support the Justice for ALS Veterans Act](#). If you'd like to watch the markup, you can do so [here](#).

Another bill approved at the markup was the PVA-supported VA Medical Cannabis Research Act of 2021, H.R. 2916. This legislation would allow VA to conduct research and clinical trials on the effects of cannabis on certain health outcomes for veterans with chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder, and for other purposes. VA is a renowned research powerhouse and H.R. 2916 would allow VA to conduct studies to determine the efficacy of cannabis and cannabinoids in reducing chronic pain and the possible improvement of mental health for our nation's veterans.

PVA JOINS IATA MOBILITY AIDS ACTION GROUP

On November 2, PVA participated in the first meeting of the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) Mobility Aids Action Group. The action group is a gathering of airlines, airports, aircraft manufacturers, mobility aid manufacturers, and users of mobility devices to make improvements in mishandling of mobility aids when traveling by air. The group will be meeting on a regular basis for the next year to review the whole issue of how/why mobility aids get mishandled when they are transported by air, taking into account the entire travel process, work already under way by the Canadian Transportation Agency, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the EU Commission, and others. The goal is to provide concrete recommendations to IATA's Accessibility Working Group on how to address wheelchair and scooter damage.



BUILD BACK BETTER RETAINS PROVISIONS IMPORTANT TO VETERANS, AGING, AND DISABILITY COMMUNITIES

The latest Build Back Better proposal, while considerably pared back in scope, retains a number of provisions important to the veterans, disability, and aging communities:

- \$5 billion to improve health care delivery for veterans by modernizing VA health care facilities, leasing medical facilities, and speeding up claims processing.
- \$150 billion for Home and Community Based Services expansion under Medicaid along with \$20 million in funding through the Administration for Community Living to support a national technical assistance center for supporting direct care workforce recruitment, education and training, retention, career advancement, and for supporting family caregivers and caregiving activities.
- \$ 5 million for the Lifespan Respite Care Program in addition to amounts otherwise available for fiscal year 2022 and \$40 million for the National Family Caregiver Program's activities of national significance to fund "initiatives to address the behavioral health needs of unpaid caregivers of older individuals and older relative caregivers."
- Authorizing Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices on the costliest medicines, extending the American Rescue Plan's expanded Premium Tax Credit for Marketplace coverage, and increasing access to affordable hearing coverage under Medicare.
- Directing a portion of the funding for apprenticeship programs toward serving individuals with disabilities.
- Designating \$450 billion for project rental assistance for supportive housing for persons with disabilities.

- A HUD grant program that includes funds to make pre-occupancy home modifications to accommodate qualified homebuyers or members of their household with disabilities.
- A Small Business Administration program to support startup businesses owned or controlled by individuals with a disability.
- Funding to upgrade the accessibility of bus or rail public transportation services for persons with disabilities, including individuals who use wheelchairs.

NEWS OF NOTE

Jobs Report for People with Disabilities Reflects Gains

In October, the major employment indicators for people with disabilities reached their highest recorded levels since September 2008, when reporting for this cohort was begun by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), according to the National Trends in Disability Employment – Monthly Update (nTIDE), issued by Kessler Foundation and the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability (UNH-IOD). Substantial gains were reflected in year-to-year comparisons, as well as for month-to-month data. Read the nTIDE report [here](#).

Justice Department Files Lawsuit Against the State of Texas to Protect Voting Rights

The U.S. Justice Department has filed a lawsuit against the State of Texas and the Texas Secretary of State over certain restrictive voting procedures imposed by Texas Senate Bill 1, which was signed into law in September 2021. The United States' complaint contends, in part, that Senate Bill 1 violates Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act by improperly restricting what assistance in the polling booth voters who have a disability or are unable to read or write can receive. The complaint alleges that Senate Bill 1 harms those voters by barring their assistants from providing necessary help, including answering basic questions, responding to requests to clarify ballot translations or confirming that voters with visual impairments have marked a ballot as

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intended. The complaint asks the court to prohibit Texas from enforcing these requirements.

HEARINGS, SURVEYS, AND WEBINARS

Upcoming Hearings

For the latest VA committee hearings, please visit the [House Veterans' Affairs Committee](#) and [Senate Veterans Affairs' Committee](#) pages.

Survey on Air Travel

We still need your help to learn more about the current air travel experiences of passengers with disabilities. Please complete a [short survey](#) to help inform our policy efforts on this issue. The survey closes on November 30.

Section 508 – A Celebration of Twenty Years

On November 30 from 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM ET, the Access Board will host a webinar marking the 20th anniversary of the initial enforcement of the Section 508 Standards. This session will showcase the work of influential accessibility professionals who developed and implemented the original 508 Standards. The session will also highlight the impact the standards have had on the accessibility of information and communication technology in the United States and around the world.

Invited speakers include David Capozzi, former Executive Director of the U.S. Access Board (retired), who will discuss the collaborative process that resulted in the development of the Standards in 2000 and the Revised Standards in 2017; Bill Peterson, Department of Homeland Security (retired), who will cover the challenges with implementing the law and the ramifications; Terry Weaver, General Services Administration (retired), and John Sullivan, General Services Administration, who will review the implementation of Section 508 across government, including the continuing development of technical assistance and the creation of a central source for technical assistance and training materials at www.section508.gov. In closing, Sachin Pavithran, Executive Director of the U.S. Access Board, will present on collaboration efforts by the U.S. and global partners to promote accessibility,

the advancement of accessibility testing processes, and the progress on the development of the ICT Baseline Testing Portfolio.

To register, click [here](#).