



Veterans legislative update

Since the 117th Congress convened in January, important pieces of legislation that affect veterans have been introduced and moved through Congress. These bills address some of the top issues for veterans, including suicide prevention, access to mental health resources, resources for addressing harassment, and healthcare. Below are some of the most significant recent programs and legislation that affect NALC's veteran members.

White House strategy to reduce veteran and military suicide

In November, the administration announced a new national strategy to prevent veteran suicides. The objectives include improving lethal means safety, enhancing crisis care, facilitating care transitions and increasing access to effective care. It also focuses on addressing upstream suicidal risks, such as financial strain, lack of housing or sufficient food, and unemployment. Additionally, the strategy aims to use research coordination, data sharing and evaluation efforts to improve the understanding of factors that lead to veteran suicides, to promote the early identification of suicidal risk, and to improve the effectiveness of suicide prevention programs.

H.R. 2819/S. 1198 – Solid Start Act of 2021

This bill, introduced in July by Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) and Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH), aims to curb veteran suicides by helping veterans who are in their first year of transitioning back to civilian life. It would provide up-to-date information and resources for veterans, as well as ensure that mental health needs are addressed in a timely manner.

H.R. 4575/S. 2386 – Veteran Peer Specialist Act of 2021

Rep. Scott Peters (D-CA) and Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) introduced

this bill in July. This legislation would expand the peer specialist support program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to all medical centers of the department.

H.R. 3405/S. 544 – Battle Buddy Check Week

This legislation was introduced by Rep. Shelia Jackson (D-TX) and Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA). It directs the secretary of Veterans Affairs to designate a week as “Battle Buddy Check Week,” to inspire outreach and education on peer wellness checks for veterans. The bill passed in the Senate in October and has not yet received a vote in the House.

H.R. 5666/S. 3025 – Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2021

This bill, introduced in October by Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME) and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT), would expand healthcare and benefits for survivors of military sexual trauma.

H.R. 2704/S. 1243 – Improving VA Accountability to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Act of 2021

Rep. Chris Pappas (D-NH) and Sen. Ernst introduced this legislation, which would implement policies and oversight to improve equal employment opportunities and address harassment at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The bill passed in the House in May and has not yet been voted on in the Senate.

H.R. 2916/S. 1467 – VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2021

Rep. Lou Correa (D-CA) and Chairman Tester introduced this legislation in April. The bill would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct clinical trials on the effects of medical-grade cannabis on the health outcomes of covered veterans diagnosed with chronic pain or post-traumatic stress disorder.

H.R. 239 – Equal Access to Contraception for Veterans Act

This legislation, introduced by Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA), was passed by the House in June. This bill would prohibit the Department of Veterans Affairs from charging women veterans copays on prescribed contraceptives.

H.R. 4794/S. 2533 – Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) for Veterans Act

This legislation was introduced by Rep. Brownley and Chairman Tester in July. It would improve mammography services offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs, including strategic plans for imaging services, early detection, testing and more.

H.R. 958/S. 796 – Protecting Moms Who Served Act

This legislation, which has been passed by both chambers, was introduced by Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-IL) and Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL). It would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to implement a maternity care coordination program, with the VA giving community maternity care providers the training and support needed to care for the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum veterans.

H.R. 1836 – Guard and Reserve GI Bill Parity Act of 2021

Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA) introduced this bill in March. The legislation would expand eligibility for post-9/11 GI Bill educational assistance. Under the bill, service—which includes training, active military service, inactive training, and general duty by a reservist or National Guard member—would be eligible.

This is a sampling of the many veteran-related bills that have moved through the 117th Congress. NALC will continue to monitor these bills and other pieces of legislation that affect our veteran members. For updates, check the “Government Affairs” section on nalc.org.