

Veterans' legislation roundup

During the 117th Congress, several pieces of legislation have been introduced and moved through Congress that would affect NALC's veteran members. These bills address some of the top issues for veterans, including health care, resources for addressing sexual harassment and assault, toxic exposure and assistance for low-income veterans. Below is a sampling of some of these bills as well as legislative news for our veteran members.

New laws supporting veterans

On June 7, President Biden signed nine bills regarding veterans' education and health into law. Those include the following:

Veterans Rapid Retraining Assistance Program Restoration and Recovery Act of 2022—S. 4089

S. 4089, introduced by Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), passed in the House following Senate passage on April 26. This law will restore entitlement to educational assistance under the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program in cases of a closure of an educational institution or a disapproval of a program of education.

Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) for Veterans Act—S. 2533

S. 2533, introduced by Chairman Tester, Sens. John Boozman (R-AK), Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Collins, passed in the House following passage in the Senate on March 10. This law will upgrade mammography technology at VA facilities and establish a pilot program for veterans who cannot easily access screening services.

Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas Supporting Expanded Review for Veterans in Combat Environments (SERVICE) Act—S. 2102

S. 2102, introduced by Sen. Boozman, passed in the House following

passage in the Senate on March 24. This law will require the VA to provide mammograms to veterans who served in locations associated with exposure to burn pits.

On Nov. 30, 2021, President Biden signed four bipartisan bills into law that promote equity, provide more employment and educational opportunities and improve health care for veterans:

Public Law 117-66

This law, which was introduced by Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA), will require the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study on disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to certain benefits administered by the secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021—Public Law 117-67

This law, which unanimously passed in both chambers of Congress, was introduced by Sens. Mike Braun (R-IN) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH), and Reps. Kathleen Rice (D-NY) and Bob Latta (R-OH). It will require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to work with the Department of Defense to actively recruit and hire medical personnel to federal health care positions after their military service is complete.

Colonel John M. McHugh Tuition Fairness for Survivors Act of 2021—Public Law 117-68

Introduced by Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) and Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS), Reps. Barry Moore (R-AL) and David Trone (D-MD), this law will require public colleges and universities to provide in-state tuition to the families of service members who die or become disabled, or the institution will not receive VA educational benefits. The law was signed by the



president after passing unanimously in both chambers of Congress.

Protecting Moms Who Served Act of 2021—Public Law 117-69

Sens. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Susan Collins (R-ME), as well as Rep. Lauren Underwood (D-IL), introduced this law, which codifies the maternity care coordination programs at the VA.

Bipartisan deal reached on toxic exposure legislation

On May 18, Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Moran announced a bipartisan agreement on a comprehensive toxic exposure package that would provide relief, health care and other benefits for veterans who have been exposed to burn pits. The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022 builds on legislation that was introduced last year by House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA).

Now that a bipartisan deal has been announced, text of this bill and passage in both chambers are expected as this subject matter has become a

major bipartisan priority as evidenced by 18-plus related bills being considered during the 117th Congress.

House passes bills supporting veterans

On May 18, in honor of fallen veterans in advance of Memorial Day, the House of Representatives passed several bills that address a variety of veterans' unique needs. These include:

Lactation Spaces for Veteran Moms Act—H.R. 5738

This bill, introduced by Reps. Elaine Luria (D-VA), Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA) and Jaime Beutler (R-WA), would require the inclusion of a lactation space in each medical center of the VA.

Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Claims Coordination Act—H.R. 7335

Reps. Luria and Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA) introduced this bill. H.R. 7335 would require the Veterans Benefits Administration to coordinate with the Veterans Health Administration to provide paperwork to service members who have submitted compensation claims related to military sexual trauma.

Dignity for MST Survivors Act—H.R. 6961

H.R. 6961 was introduced by Rep. Frank Mrvan (D-IN). It would improve hearings before the Board of Veterans' Appeals regarding claims filed that involve military sexual trauma.

H.R. 6064

Rep. Troy Nehls (R-TX) introduced H.R. 6064, which would require the VA to enter into an agreement with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to complete a comprehensive review of the military sexual trauma disability exam process.

VA Peer Support Enhancement for MST Survivors Act—H.R. 2724

This bill, introduced by Reps. Antonio Delgado (D-NY) and Nancy Mace (R-SC), would direct the secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide peer support specialists for claimants who are survivors of military sexual trauma.

Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General Training Act of 2021—H.R. 6052

Reps. Lauren Underwood (D-IL) and David McKinley (R-WV) introduced this bill, which would require the VA to develop and implement employee training programs on reporting issues to the Office of Inspector General.

House bills to help low-income veterans

More than 15 bills that aim to help veterans facing financial hardship have been introduced in the House. These bills propose a variety of programs and assistance for low-income veterans, including free legal services at VA facilities for civil matters associated with health care or other benefits, a pilot program to build homes for veterans who experience homelessness, the establishment of a new Office of Food Insecurity at the VA, a pilot program that would establish an alternative credit-scoring process for veterans, and increased military spousal support.

Confirmation vote for VA undersecretary stalled

The VA's top medical position, the undersecretary of health, has not been filled by a Senate-confirmed appointee for five years. In May, President Biden's nominee, Dr. Shereef Elnahal, was expected to be confirmed. Elnahal is the president and chief

executive officer of University Hospital in Newark, NJ. He previously served as New Jersey's health commissioner. Prior to that, he was the assistant deputy undersecretary for health and quality, safety and value at the VA.

Despite a smooth advancement vote from the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, when Elnahal's confirmation was brought to the Senate floor, Sen. Rick Scott (R-FL) turned it into a partisan matter by blocking the vote and questioning the president's ability to appoint "qualified individuals." Chairman Tester said that Scott's obstruction of the vote was hindering veterans from receiving the health care that they deserve. As this magazine was going to print, the position remained vacant.

NALC will continue monitoring these bills as well as other new pieces of legislation and programs that are introduced that will affect our veteran members. For updates, check the "Government Affairs" section on nalc.org.

Join the NALC Veterans Group

The NALC Veterans Group is designed to provide NALC members—both active and retired letter carriers—who are also military veterans the ability to connect with fellow NALC veterans and stay informed on issues of importance to letter carrier veterans. It is free to join.

Members receive a pin as a symbol of gratitude for their military service and membership in NALC.

If you are interested in joining the group, complete the sign-up card at nalc.org/veterans.