

## Veterans' legislative update

**I**n the first six months of the 118th Congress, numerous bills that would affect veterans have been introduced and moved through Congress. These bills address some of the top issues for veterans, including health care, benefits, suicide prevention, homelessness, and more. Below is a sampling of some of these bills and how they would address veterans' unique needs.

**In advance of Memorial Day, the House passed three bills the week of May 22:**

### **VET-TEC Authorization Act of 2023—H.R. 1669**

This bill, introduced by Reps. Juan Ciscomani (R-AZ) and Ro Khanna (D-CA), would cover costs for veterans seeking job training in high-tech industries. The Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET-TEC) program was created as a five-year pilot program in 2017 and is set to expire next year. The bill would codify the program, which covers the cost of tuition and housing for veterans who are enrolled in a full-time technology training program and are eligible for Veterans Affairs (VA) education assistance under the GI Bill, through September 2028. Sens. Kevin Cramer (R-ND) and Angus King (I-ME) introduced a Senate companion bill (S. 1678) on May 18.

### **Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2023—S. 777**

This bill, introduced by Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) and Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS), passed in the Senate on March 30 and in the House on May 22. The legislation would provide disabled veterans and their families with a cost-of-living adjustment to their

disability and survivors' compensation, effective Dec. 1.

### **Korean American VALOR Act—H.R. 366**

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA) introduced H.R. 366. The bill would require the VA to extend health care benefits and related services to members of the South Korean armed forces who served in the Vietnam War.

**Other pending bills affecting veterans:**

### **VA Same-Day Scheduling Act of 2023—H.R. 41**

Rep. Jim Baird (R-IN) introduced this bill, which would require the VA to ensure that when a veteran enrolled in the VA health care system contacts the agency by phone to schedule an appointment, the scheduling must occur during that call.

### **Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act—H.R. 645**

Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (D-FL) introduced this bill, which would permanently authorize the use of certain VA funds to provide assistance, including shelter, transportation and communication devices, to veterans in need. It would provide housing to an estimated 33,000 unhoused veterans.

### **Vet CENTERS for Mental Health Act of 2023—H.R. 733**

Reps. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ), Tom Kean (R-NJ) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) reintroduced this bill, which would expand access to Vet Center mental health counseling for veterans and their families. It would ensure that underserved areas have access to this care by establishing a



minimum requirement of Vet Centers per state based on 2020 census data.

### **Not Just a Number Act—S. 928**

Chairman Tester and Sen. John Boozman (R-AR) introduced this bill, which would require the VA to comprehensively examine the factors that can best prevent veteran suicide. It would require the VA to analyze veterans' benefits usage in its annual suicide prevention report and examine which VA benefits have the greatest impact on preventing suicide.

### **Expanding Veterans' Options for Long Term Care Act—S. 495**

S. 495 was introduced by Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, and Sens. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Mike Rounds (R-SD). The bill would create a three-year pilot program for eligible veterans to receive assisted living care paid for by the VA.

### **Veterans and the debt-limit deal**

The bipartisan Fiscal Responsibility Act, which President Biden signed into law on June 3, averted a default on the nation's debt while limiting federal spending. Under the law, most non-defense government agen-

cies will receive flat budgets over the next two years. However, the VA will receive a budget increase of about 6 percent, or \$320 billion, in Fiscal Year 2024 compared to Fiscal Year 2023.

The deal also included \$20 billion for the Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF), the full amount that President Biden requested in his budget. The TEF covers

the costs of benefits for veterans suffering from diseases caused by toxic exposure. The law also exempts veterans from the increased work requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which will affect those aged 18 to 54 starting in 2024.

The deal is positive news for veterans, since VA officials had warned

that benefits checks, medical reimbursements and other services could have been delayed if the debt ceiling was not addressed.

**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](http://nalc.org).

## MDA Report

# July 2023 Branch Challenge



Christina Vela Davidson



**I**t is time for the second MDA Branch Challenge of 2023! From July 1-31, branches can join the challenge by sending in any offline income raised to MDA’s Chicago office (address provided below). Branches are already registered on the MDA/NALC website. Find your branch page at [mda.donordrive.com/event/NALC2023](http://mda.donordrive.com/event/NALC2023). This will be your branch’s online hub for the entire year to raise money on the web, host events, and track all offline donations/checks, too!

The 2023 July Branch Challenge will continue to fundraise during MDA Summer Camp. There has been a significant increase in the cost for MDA to send kids to camp this summer, and we still need your help to ensure that each child who wants to attend MDA Summer Camp has a spot:

- \$3,000 is the average cost for one camper to attend MDA Summer Camp.
- \$1,000 is the cost to provide durable medical equipment rentals for a camp location.

Does your branch want to help give children “the best week of the year” at MDA Summer Camp? Branches that raise \$3,000 in July will be awarded prizes and recognition in email and social media.

If the challenge raises \$100,000, NALC will cover the

equivalent cost for 33 kids to attend camp this summer. We can do this together. Connect with me at any time with questions or for assistance.

Remember, volunteers are always needed for MDA Summer Camp. Camp can change *your* life just as it changes the lives of campers. MDA Summer Camp wouldn’t be possible without people like you, sisters and brothers. You can make an impact on children’s lives with neuromuscular diseases during the best week of the year.

**MDA’s mailing address:** Sending in checks? Be sure to use the NALC allocation form and send it to us at:

Muscular Dystrophy Association

Attn: NALC

P.O. Box 7410354

Chicago, IL 60674-0354

**MDA outreach:** MDA is making a huge effort to reach out to as many branches as possible over the next couple of months by phone, email or text. Some of you should have already received a Memorial Day text from MDA, but be on the lookout for more about the July Branch Challenge and engagement opportunities in the coming weeks. Update your contact info so that MDA may have an email address *and* mobile number for your branch president and/or MDA coordinator.

**Connect with MDA:** Please contact MDA for answers to questions, help with fundraising, or to confirm they have contact information for your branch. You can reach them at 312-392-1100 or [nalc@mdausa.org](mailto:nalc@mdausa.org).