



# Washington Update

Check out the [PVAction Force](#) page to view alerts and a list of key legislation.

## VETERANS FUNDING BILL ADVANCES IN THE HOUSE

Recently, the House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. Their draft measure provides a total of \$369.3 billion for the department, including \$112.6 billion for veteran's health care. Roughly \$34 billion would go toward care in the community, another \$1.3 billion is allocated for women veterans' gender specific care, while \$925 million goes toward medical and prosthetics research. House appropriators also apportioned \$894 million for the department's ongoing electronic health record (EHR) modernization project with the caveat that 25 percent of these funds would not be available until July 1, 2025, and their release is contingent upon the VA reporting to Congress on the EHR's stability, usability, and other related issues.

Additionally, the bill includes \$131 billion in advance FY 2026 funding for the Veterans Medical Care account – equal to the President's budget request in discretionary resources, and \$22.8 billion in advance for medical care through the Toxic Exposures Fund, for a total of \$154 billion in FY 2026. Also, the bill provides \$2.4 billion for VA construction programs which is equal to the budget request and \$796 million above the enacted level. Within this amount, \$2.1 billion is for major construction projects while \$380 million goes toward minor construction projects. Another \$307 million in funds

made available from the Recurring Expenses Transformational Fund will support additional VA construction projects, for a total funding level of \$2.8 billion in FY 2025. Language in the bill will continue to allow VA to provide fertility counseling and treatment using assisted reproductive technologies, like IVF, to covered veterans or their spouses or for adoption reimbursement. Several provisions included in the bill focused on controversial social issues and threaten its approval by the Senate. At last report, the bill could be brought to the House floor for consideration the week of June 3.

## OMNIBUS BILL STALLS, VSOs UNITE TO TRY TO GET IT MOVING AGAIN

Earlier this month, we reported on the introduction of a comprehensive legislative package of veterans-related bills. H.R. 8371, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, contains the language of the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act (H.R. 542/S. 141), which raises the cap on how much the VA can pay for the cost of home care and directs the department to make home and community-based services like Veteran Directed Care available at all of its medical centers. It also incorporated language from the Expanding Veterans' Options for Long Term Care Act (H.R. 1815/S. 495) to test the viability of allowing the VA to directly pay for care provided by assisted living



facilities. The bill, which was introduced on May 14 with strong support from veterans service organizations (VSO), is facing opposition over some of its contents from members on both sides of the aisle. As a result, the bill was pulled from floor consideration in the House, where it remains in limbo.

Prior to Memorial Day, PVA and other organizations came together to ask Congress to put politics aside and work together to find a path forward to enact this critical legislation before the Fourth of July. You can read our letter [here](#). The path forward for this bill remains unclear, but we are continuing to work with stakeholders to overcome opposition, so that this vital legislation can be passed as quickly as possible.

### HOUSE DEFENSE POLICY BILL TAKES SHAPE

The Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) has advanced out of the House Armed Services Committee. This measure typically focuses on defense programs and personnel issues, but in recent years, lawmakers have used the bill to advance some veterans-related provisions. This year's initial draft version looks pretty lean in terms of language regarding veterans issues. There is a provision extending authorities for funding and management of the Joint Department of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Demonstration Fund for the Captain James A. Lovell Health Care Center in Illinois. Another section of the bill seeks to improve the VA's portion of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). It also includes a provision that would allow accredited veterans service organizations to participate in TAP, so they can present information on how they can assist in filing claims for benefits. The NDAA is often heavily amended when the bill comes to the floor, so there is a possibility that other veterans-related provisions could be added. That's likely to occur soon, but the exact date is unclear.

### UPDATE ON VA HOME LOAN PROGRAM MORATORIUM

The VA recently issued guidance to strongly encourage mortgage servicers to implement a targeted moratorium on foreclosures and provide time to help veterans at risk

of losing their homes to access a new, last-resort tool, the Veteran Affairs Servicing Purchase (VASP) Program. Eligibility for the VASP program will be determined by the VA in cooperation with a veteran's mortgage servicer, and only when all other home retention efforts have been exhausted. The targeted moratorium will only apply to a VA-guaranteed home under certain circumstances.

Last year, PVA signed on in support of the VA extending a foreclosure moratorium for veterans who were struggling to pay their mortgage following the pandemic. Recently, we signed on to an additional letter that urged VA to extend the moratorium through December 31, 2024. If you used a VA home loan to purchase your home and are finding it difficult to pay your mortgage in part, or in full, check out the VA home loan site [here](#).

### PVA SUBMITS COMMENTS ON SERVICE ANIMAL AIR TRAVEL FORMS

On April 29, the Department of Transportation (DOT) published their second [notice](#) seeking public comment to renew the DOT Service Animal Air Transportation and Service Animal Relief Attestation Forms, pursuant to the Paperwork Reduction Act. PVA submitted [comments](#) reemphasizing our position that paperwork requirements create additional barriers and burdens for people with disabilities who use service animals to travel and should be eliminated. PVA also made suggestions on how DOT can make the forms more accessible for people with disabilities, including requiring training for air carrier staff and consistency of the forms across the industry.

### NEWS OF NOTE

#### 27th Annual VA Psychology Leadership Conference

On May 9, the VA Psychology Leadership Conference held its annual event. The theme of this year's conference was "Psychologist Voices Advancing Veteran Mental Health." VA Secretary Denis McDonough was the keynote speaker. PVA's Senior Health Policy Advisor, Roscoe Butler, served on a panel of veterans service

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organizations where he discussed PVA's 2024 policy priorities and steps PVA is taking to address veteran suicide. He mentioned PVA is an active member of FACE THE FIGHT, which is a coalition of corporations, foundations, and non-profit and veteran-focused organizations joined together to raise awareness and support for veteran suicide prevention.

You can read more about FACE THE FIGHT [here](#).

### DOJ Publishes Web Accessibility Compliance Guide

In April, the Department of Justice (DOJ) [published](#) their final rule, Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability; Accessibility of Web Information and Services of State and Local Government Entities. The rule ensures the accessibility of web content and mobile applications for people with disabilities. On May 22, the DOJ published a [Small Entity Compliance Guide](#) to assist those who work for or with state or local governments to help them understand the new web content and mobile app accessibility requirements. The guide provides examples to clarify specific details about the requirements.

### REMINDER: Comment Period Extended 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:** Previously due May 13. **Now open until June 12, 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 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.

## SURVEYS & HEARINGS

### Community Survey on Transportation Needs of People with Disabilities

The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund is collaborating with Smart Growth America and the International Parking & Mobility Institute on an Accessible Streetscape Project to learn more about the needs of and challenges faced by people with disabilities when walking and rolling in their community. As part of the project, they have developed a [survey](#) to receive feedback from the community. The results of the survey will result in the creation of an *Accessible Streetscape Design Guide*. This effort will cover best practices and serve as an initial conversation piece where entities such as the National Association of City Transportation Officials and other transportation organizations, alongside the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Access Board, can dive deeper into engineering and planning semantics.

### Upcoming Veterans' Committee Activities

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

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