



Paralyzed Veterans
of America

WASHINGTON UPDATE

Recent news regarding legislation and regulatory actions affecting veterans and people with disabilities.

Written and produced by Paralyzed Veterans of America - Government Relations Department

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UPDATE ON PVA'S LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF WOMEN VETERANS

On May 19, Maureen Elias, Associate Legislative Director, spoke at a House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC), Women Veterans Task Force virtual forum titled, "[Resilience and Coping: Mental Health of Women Veterans](#)." In her remarks, Ms. Elias spoke about the need for VA health care providers to screen for mental health issues, including depression and in-home and caregiver violence among women veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D); the need for more research for women veterans with SCI/D; and the need for VA to track information on the usage of VA mental health services among women veterans with SCI/D. She also applauded VA's use of special hiring abilities during COVID-19 and encouraged Congress to keep those in place after the pandemic to fill VA vacancies, especially the thousands of vacant mental health provider positions. Ms. Elias also asked that efforts undertaken to increase the use of telehealth continue as veterans with SCI/D are at high-risk for the virus.

Then, on May 21, PVA hosted a veterans service organization (VSO) round table with Andrea Goldstein, Senior Policy Advisor for the HVAC, Women Veterans Task Force. PVA National Vice President Tammy Jones, Associate Executive Director of Government Affairs Heather Ansley, and Ms. Elias participated in the event as well as representatives from IAVA, DAV, VFW, The American Legion, and MOAA. The VSO representatives discussed the most pressing concerns they had including a lack of targeted outreach to women veterans from VA, the status of VA's "Stand up to Sexual Harassment" campaign, the Deborah Sampson Act legislation, and VA staffing shortages.

CELEBRATE THE ADA 30TH ANNIVERSARY

On July 26, we will mark the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This landmark disability rights law provided protections for people with disabilities in employment, state and local government services, and public accommodations. PVA was a key part of the coalition that pressed for its passage and has created a dedicated web page – www.pva.org/ADA - containing fact sheets about various aspects of the law and links to resources that can help advocates and supporters draw attention to the law's achievements as

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well as the need for continued enforcement vigilance.

While PVA and many other organizations had planned numerous public events to celebrate the ADA, the current public health environment means that those events will be mainly virtual. However, there is an array of material for online ADA anniversary events and local activities that have been collected by the national network of ADA Centers to ensure that supporters of the ADA can mark this occasion in appropriate style.

One very basic way advocates can ensure attention to the ADA in their community is to ask their local government officials who is the ADA Coordinator. Communities with 50 or more employees are required by the ADA to designate such a position and were supposed to create a transition plan for compliance with the ADA. To observe ADA 30, advocates can ask the ADA coordinator to engage with the disability community to re-evaluate and update existing transition plans, assess pedestrian access and identify areas in need of improvement, or survey websites for accessibility and prioritize web pages to be updated based on use and content.

Efforts are underway to highlight the ADA on social media through posts on Twitter and Facebook and through the use of hashtags such as #ThanksToTheADA. Through these platforms, supporters are invited to share a moment in their lives when they were thankful for the ADA. Ways to participate through videos, pictures, written words, or other means can be found [here](#). More information can also be found [here](#).

As noted, PVA has been highlighting aspects of the ADA throughout 2020 – in issue briefs, PN articles, and our own social media. Recent articles have focused on the history of the ADA and PVA's role in its passage, challenges in hotel and parking access, and housing that is and is not covered by the ADA. Forthcoming articles will focus on the ADA's coverage of service animals, employment protections, voting access, and existing tax credits and deductions that promote compliance with the law. PVA is also planning an ADA 30 webinar on July 23 from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. ET. Details about that event will be made available in the coming weeks. Check www.pva.org/ADA for updates.

NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- PVA Participates in Veteran Listening Session with House Appropriations Leader

Morgan Brown, National Legislative Director, recently participated in a veteran listening session with the Chairwoman of the House Appropriations, Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and other Agencies Subcommittee, Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL). Conversation focused exclusively on issues directly related to COVID-19, including its impact on veterans, access to VA care, and future congressional actions needed to help VA

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resume normal operations.

Mr. Brown pointed out that PVA members must be able to safely visit their VA or community health care providers and reschedule their routine health care appointments that had been canceled due to the pandemic. He also asked for Congress's continued support of PVA authored language in the House-passed Heroes Act, H.R. 6800, that would temporarily increase special monthly compensation and Aid & Attendance by 25 percent so catastrophically disabled veterans can afford necessary home care. Finally, the need to stay at home during the pandemic has highlighted the need to ensure that our members' homes are modified to accommodate their disabilities. He asked the Chairwoman to press House leaders to quickly pass the Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement legislation, H.R. 3504, to ensure that catastrophically disabled veterans have access to additional benefits that allow them to remain in their homes long-term.

- VA Announces Plan to Return to 'Pre-COVID-19 Operations'

On May 7, VA released its [plan](#) for resuming pre-pandemic operations. VA emphasized that its three-phase plan aims to "maximize veterans' safety." Local conditions will govern how quickly each of its facilities returns to normal operations. The plan will guide not only VA medical facilities but also cemeteries and benefits offices. On May 18, VA announced a [list](#) of VA medical facilities that will begin to reintroduce suspended services.

- Veterans Legacy Memorial Website Updates

Just prior to Memorial Day, VA updated their Veterans Legacy Memorial [website](#) so that friends, families, and visitors can leave tributes and/or comments on a veteran's memorial page. This applies to any veteran interred in any of VA's 140 national cemeteries. To [find a veteran](#), enter the name in the database search tool. You can modify your search by branch, war era, and location. After creating an account on the website, you can leave a direct entry, reply to someone else's tribute, or leave a memento or photos. You can then share that tribute on social media. You can also like someone else's tribute. There are plans to expand this service for veterans interred at Army cemeteries (including Arlington National Cemetery), cemeteries managed by other military departments, the National Park Service, the American Battle Monuments Commission, tribal cemeteries, state/territory cemeteries, or private cemeteries.

- Introduction of the Caring for Our Survivors Act of 2020

PVA, in close coordination with DAV, worked to get [H.R. 6933](#), the Caring for our Survivors Act of 2020, introduced by Representatives Cox (D-CA), Cisneros (D-CA), Yoho (R-FL), Van

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Drew (R-FL), and Hayes (D-CT). The bill was announced in a [press release](#) last week, just prior to the Memorial Day weekend. This bill improves benefits to those who lost their loved ones to service-related conditions, by bringing the compensation rate equal to what the survivors of federal service survivors receive. It also includes a provision lowering the threshold of eligibility for dependency and indemnity compensation, allowing for a graduated scale to provide benefits for those who lost their loved ones; and lowers the remarriage age of surviving spouses to 55.

- American Association on Health and Disability COVID-19 and Disability Survey

The American Association on Health and Disability (AAHD) has released the COVID-19 and Disability Survey [Summary Report](#). The purpose of the survey was to conduct a rapid, real-time online assessment of the coronavirus pandemic's impact on access to health care on adults with a range of disabilities and was conducted from April 17 through May 1. The survey and report can be found on the AAHD [website](#).

- AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving Release 2020 Update

The National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP recently released, "Caregiving in the U.S. 2020." This report is the most recent update to their trended research series, "Caregiving in the U.S.," conducted roughly every five years. The 2020 update reveals an increase in the number of family caregivers in the United States of 9.5 million from 2015 to 2020. Family caregivers now encompass more than one in five Americans. The study also reveals that family caregivers are in worse health compared to five years ago. The report, executive summary, infographics, and demographic issue briefs can be found [here](#).

- House Education and Labor Committee Hosts Forum on COVID-19 and People with Disabilities

On May 18, the House Education and Labor Committee convened a [member briefing](#) to hear from two witnesses about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on people with disabilities. The briefing featured expert testimony from Shireen McSpadden, Executive Director of the Department of Disability and Aging Services for the City and County of San Francisco, and Kelly Buckland, Executive Director of the National Council on Independent Living. The forum broadcast can be found on [YouTube](#).

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HEARINGS, WEBINARS, AND SURVEYS

- The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee will hold a [hearing](#) on Wednesday, June 3 at 3:00 p.m. ET on VA's budget, including COVID-19 funding. The Independent Budget VSOs, including PVA, will be providing a statement for the record.
- The House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Health, will hold a [hearing](#) on Wednesday, June 3 at 2:00 p.m. ET on VA's ability to respond to a natural disaster during a pandemic. PVA will be providing a statement for the record.
- PVA and the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation will be co-hosting a [free webinar](#) on Self-Care in the Age of COVID-19 on June 2 at 11:00 a.m. ET. The discussion will address fears around the COVID-19 pandemic, offer self-care tips, and share practical relaxation strategies during these challenging and uncertain times. To register, please visit. https://pva.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IBdWrdF1TDemsgda7Sz7CQ.
- As we prepare for the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities on July 26, we need your help. Please complete our survey regarding the accessibility experience of people with disabilities who use wheelchairs. The survey link is available [here](#).