



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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SPECIALLY ADAPTED HOUSING BILL MOVES TO PRESIDENT'S DESK

On July 23rd, the House unanimously approved H.R. 3504, the Ryan Kules and Paul Benne Specially Adaptive Housing Improvement Act of 2019. The bill is now with the President. We have every indication that he will sign the bill into law.

Beginning October 1st, this legislation increases the overall value of the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant to \$98,492 and provides qualifying veterans with twice as many opportunities to access their grant. As of October 1, 2030, eligible veterans who have exhausted their benefit will be able to apply for a supplemental grant if VA determines their residence still needs modifications.

Much to our consternation, the House had been holding the bill for nearly three months. But thanks to those who participated in our recent VoterVoice grassroots advocacy campaign on this bill, coupled with the efforts of PVA National, we were able to convince the House to act. Now, our focus will shift from advocacy to monitoring its implementation.

During our [June 23rd webinar](#) on VA's adaptive housing programs, Mr. Jason Latona, Chief, Specially Adapted Housing, let PVA members know that VA has been preparing for passage of this legislation and is ready to begin implementing the program once it is authorized. Incidentally, one of the most important components of the initial legislation would have prioritized SAH claims for veterans diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Due to PVA's advocacy, VA recognized the need for this change and adjusted its processes to accommodate these veterans as the bill was working its way through the legislative process. Since VA had already acted on behalf of ALS veterans, that provision was not included in the final bill.

PVA TESTIFIES ON IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SOCIAL SECURITY AND ITS BENEFICIARIES

On July 17th, Deputy Executive Director Shaun Castle [testified](#) on behalf of PVA before the House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee concerning the effects of the coronavirus on Social Security disability (SSDI) beneficiaries and the Social Security system. Mr. Castle reflected on the experiences of several PVA members who have been struggling with

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the isolation brought on by the pandemic and worries over exposure of themselves and their caregivers to the virus. He also reported on problems faced by clients of PVA's vocational rehabilitation program in reaching Social Security Administration field offices which have gone almost completely online.

Mr. Castle reiterated PVA's strong support for the Social Security 2100 Act, H.R. 860, and its many benefit improvements and well-balanced measures to strengthen the Social Security system for the long term and applauded the efforts to provide temporary relief during the pandemic to Social Security beneficiaries through H.R. 6356, the Emergency Social Security Benefits Improvement Act. He also expressed PVA's continued support for additional steps to protect beneficiaries with disabilities through H.R. 4386, the Stop the Wait Act. That legislation would eliminate the five-month waiting period for SSDI as well as the 24-month waiting period for Medicare.

In addition, PVA offered its support for H.R. 7499, the Social Security COVID Correction and Equity Act which was introduced to address an unforeseen consequence of the economic downturn that could have dramatic and long-lasting adverse effects on millions of Social Security beneficiaries. Because Social Security benefits are based on a complex formula using average wages, the massive unemployment caused by the COVID-19 recession could cause a severe drop in benefits for those born in 1960. H.R. 7499 would prevent that from happening.

CELEBRATING ADA30

Numerous organizations marked the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the new virtual environment during the week leading up to the anniversary on July 26th and continuing through the summer. A sampling of some of those events includes:

- **NOD, Bush Foundation Highlight ADA History** – The National Organization on Disability and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation sponsored [The ADA at 30: Let the Shameful Wall of Exclusion Come Down](#), a virtual celebration moderated by PBS anchor Judy Woodruff. The program featured remarks by former Sen. Robert Dole (R-KS), former Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), former Rep. Tony Coelho (D-CA), Chairman of the National Organization on Disability Tom Ridge, and former officials from the President George H.W. Bush administration on their roles in gaining passage of the law.
- **FEMA Celebrates ADA 30** – In observance of the 30th anniversary of the ADA, FEMA has published a [blog](#) entitled, "30 Ways FEMA Supports Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery for People with Disabilities."
- **The ADA at 30: A Vision for a Future with Full Inclusion and Equity** – The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities sponsored a [panel discussion](#) of subject matter experts on key issues that remain of significant concern for the disability community 30 years after the ADA's passage. Offering their thoughts on what the future holds for ADA

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enforcement and implementation were Vanita Gupta, President and CEO, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights; Germán Parodi, Co-Executive Director, Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies; Maria Town, CEO, American Association of People with Disabilities; and Monique Dixon, Deputy Director of Policy and Director of State Advocacy, NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

- **PVA Marks ADA30** – PVA hosted a webinar on July 23rd on its role in the passage of the ADA with reflections by three PVA members about the impact of the law on their lives. The webinar and other ADA 30 related materials can be found on PVA's dedicated [web page](#).
- **ADA 30 Lead On: A Celebration of Disability Arts, Culture, Education and Pride** - [chronicles](#) the disability rights movement and five titles of the Americans with Disabilities Act as told through comedy, dance, and art.

NEWS ITEMS OF NOTE

- House Passes VA Funding Bill

On July 24th, the House passed, 224-189, a funding bill that provides \$104.8 billion for VA, with \$12.5 billion in emergency funding to help with rising health care costs for veterans. This appropriation provides a 13 percent increase over FY 2020. It also includes a one-year extension of VA's authority to provide advanced reproductive technologies like IVF, a top priority for PVA. VA's bill is linked to the military construction funding bill, which includes politically-charged provisions related to wall funding along the border with Mexico and renaming of military bases. It is likely that VA will start FY2021 under a continuing resolution as the House and Senate finalize their differences. A fact sheet is available [here](#).

- Senate Veterans' Committee Hosts VSO Roundtable

PVA recently [participated](#) in a closed [Senate Roundtable](#) hosted by U.S. Senator Jerry Moran, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, to address veteran equality and ways VA can better serve minorities. Senators, VSOs, and individual veterans came together to discuss multiple topics including barriers to care, unique issues for specific populations of veterans, and needed improvements.

- House Veterans' Committee Hearing on Sexual Harassment at VA

On July 22nd, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and the Women Veterans Task Force met in an open session to conduct an oversight hearing entitled, "Safety for All: Ending Sexual Harassment in the

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Department of Veterans Affairs.” VA representatives at the hearing included Ms. Pamela Powers, Acting Deputy Secretary; Mr. Dan Sitterly, Assistant Secretary, Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness; Dr. Patricia Hayes, Chief Consultant, Women’s Health Services, Office of Patient Care Services, Veterans Health Administration; and Ms. Lelia Jackson, Senior Strategist for the Office of the Chief of Staff, Veterans Health Administration. The hearing covered topics including the safety of VA employees following a [GAO](#) report that one in four women working at VA reported sexual harassment. Other topics included harassment of patients at VA and lack of clear reporting channels, procedures when a report occurs, and follow-up. PVA submitted a statement for the record which, among other things, highlighted the need to protect veterans who are vulnerable to physical harm. The hearing can be viewed [here](#).

- PVA Submits a Statement for House Veterans’ Committee Legislative Hearing

On July 23rd, the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee met to review more than a dozen bills focusing on burial benefits, life insurance programs, and reinstatement of the 48-hour review for claims processing. VA representatives at the hearing included Dr. Maria Llorente, Assistant Deputy Undersecretary for Health for Patient Care Services, Veterans Health Administration(VHA); Dr. Amanda Johnson, Director of Reproductive Health, VHA; Mr. Yuri Walker, RN, JD, MPH, Director of Risk Management Program at Office of Integrity, VHA; Ms. Beth Murphy, Executive Director of Compensation Service, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA); Ms. Charmain Bogue, Executive Director of Education Service, VBA; and Mr. Glenn Powers, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations, National Cemetery Administration. The hearing can be viewed [here](#).

- House Appropriations Bill Funds DOL VETS Programs

The House Appropriations Committee issued its report in mid-July for funding of the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. Included in the massive funding bill was \$312 million for fiscal year 2021 for the Department of Labor’s Veterans Employment and Training Service, of which \$29.3 million is directed to the Transition Assistance Program, \$57.5 million to the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, and continuation of funding for the Disabled Veterans Program that was created in the 2020 appropriation.

- Census Reminder

The U.S. Census Bureau is sending [reminder postcards](#) to an estimated 34.3 million households. This will be the final mailing before census takers begin visiting nonresponding households across the nation in mid-August. Responding now minimizes the need for census takers to visit homes to collect responses in person.

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- Effort to Expand VA's list of Medical Conditions Associated with Agent Orange Advances

The Senate approved language in its version of the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would expand VA's list of medical conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange to include bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and parkinsonism. PVA endorsed the effort which was led by Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-MT). Unfortunately, the House did not include similar language in its version of the bill; so, this will be one of many differences that must be negotiated in a joint House-Senate conference this fall.

- Hearing on Getting Veterans To Work After COVID-19

On July 21st, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a virtual oversight hearing entitled, "[Getting Veterans to Work After COVID-19.](#)" PVA submitted a statement for the record. According to PVA, employment rates for veterans with significant disabilities, including many PVA members, have consistently lagged behind those of their counterparts without disabilities. According to Department of Labor statistics, veterans with service-connected disabilities are less likely to participate in the labor force than veterans without disabilities.

WEBINAR

- Want to learn more about what the ADA has to say about face covering requirements? The ADA Centers held a webinar on July 28 entitled, "[Face Coverings and the ADA-Application under Title III.](#)"