



CONCERNED
VETERANS
FOR AMERICA

Testimony of
Concerned Veterans for America
before the
United States Senate
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
on
Pending Legislation

September 16, 2015

S. 290 (Moran), the Increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability to Veterans Act of 2015

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the accountability of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

In the wake of last year's VA scandals, Congress approved a measure allowing for VA Senior Executive Service (SES) officials to be more easily removed from VA employment. However, more accountability is needed. This bill would make strides toward increasing accountability for SES officials by requiring that a removed employee's covered service not be considered for the calculation of the annual annuity for the individual, and by allowing the Secretary to order that the covered service of an employee who retires prior to a final determination not be considered for the annuity. Additionally, it further clarifies the criteria for yearly performance appraisals for SES employees, as well as restricts the amount of administrative leave – or any other paid non-duty status—on which a given employee may be placed to 14 days in any 365-day period.

CVA SUPPORTS this legislation.

S. 563 (Moran/Tester), the Physician Ambassadors Helping Veterans Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the Physician Ambassadors Helping Veterans program to seek to employ physicians at the Department of Veterans Affairs on a without compensation basis in practice areas and specialties with staffing shortages and long appointment waiting times.

This legislation would establish a volunteer program that would allow qualified physicians to provide assistance on a no-compensation basis at VA medical centers that are experiencing

staffing shortages, or in practice areas or specialties that exceed wait time goals established by the Department of Veterans Affairs. While this is no substitute for more comprehensive reform that addresses the issues faced by VA in a more systemic way, CVA believes that marshalling the resources of the community to serve veterans in need is an important short-term step toward addressing the issues of an understaffed VA, which often results in extended wait times for veterans in need of care.

CVA SUPPORTS this legislation.

S. 564 (Moran/Tester), the *Veterans Hearing Aid Access and Assistance Act*

To amend title 38, United States Code, to include licensed hearing aid specialists as eligible for appointment in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.

S. 1450 (Hirono), the *Department of Veterans Affairs Emergency Medical Staffing Recruitment and Retention Act*

To amend title 38, United States Code, to allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to modify the hours of employment of physicians and physician assistants employed on a full-time basis by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Current VA practices regarding schedule management for medical professionals are misaligned with best practices that are being utilized in the private sector. This legislation would provide statutory authorization to allow flexibility in scheduling that mirrors private sector practices, which will assist in recruiting and retention of medical professionals. CVA stands by its call for comprehensive VA reform, but we regard movement toward alignment with industry best practices as progress.

CVA SUPPORTS this legislation.

S. 1451 (Hirono), the *Veterans' Survivors Claims Processing Automation Act of 2015*

To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to adjudicate and pay survivor's benefits without requiring the filing of a formal claim, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION this legislation.

S. 1460 (Brown/Tillis), the *Fry Scholarship Enhancement Act of 2015*

To amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program to cover recipients of the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry scholarship, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.

S. 1693 (Hirono)

To expand eligibility for reimbursement for emergency medical treatment to certain veterans that were unable to receive care from the Department of Veterans Affairs in the 24-month period preceding the furnishing of such emergency treatment, and for other purposes.

Under current law, in order to be eligible for reimbursement for emergency for care at a non-VA facility, enrolled veterans must have received VA care within the preceding 24 months. In some cases, veterans have been denied this reimbursement despite the fact that they have requested and scheduled a new patient examination, though excessive wait times have prevented them from receiving the examination. This legislation would provide VA the flexibility to provide reimbursement to these veterans, who number as many as 144,000 by some estimates. CVA believes this is a common-sense measure, particularly at a time when wait times remains a persistent problem in VA care access.

CVA SUPPORTS this legislation.

S. 1856 (Blumenthal)

To provide for suspension and removal of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs for performance or misconduct that is a threat to public health or safety and to improve accountability of employees of the Department, and for other purposes.

While CVA appreciates this attempt to improve accountability for incompetent VA employees, we believe that the standard employed in this legislation sets the bar too low. It goes without saying that VA employees who threaten public health or safety should not be granted safe haven in VA. CVA, however, is concerned that this legislation would fail to hold accountable employees who fail to live up to their responsibilities to veterans, even if their actions do not rise to the level of threatening public health and safety. As such, we cannot support this legislation, and we instead urge support of **S. 1082**, the *VA Accountability Act*.

CVA OPPOSES this legislation.

S. 1938 (Blumenthal/Tillis), the Career Ready Student Veterans Act

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the approval of certain programs of education for purposes of educational assistance provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.

Discussion Draft

To make improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to educational assistance, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.