



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

On

Pending Health Care and Benefits Legislation

2nd Session, 114th Congress

May 24, 2016

Statement of Martin Caraway, Legislative Chairman National Association of County Veterans Service Officers

Good afternoon Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and Members of the Committee, the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO), is honored to present to you the views we have concerning the pending legislation before you today.

The National Association of County Veterans Service Officers is an organization made up of 1,600 local government employees, who work with veterans every day to aid in the delivery of veterans' benefits, advocacy, health care enrollment amongst others. We would like to thank you for your commitment in remedying some of the largest struggles we as advocates' face and more importantly that veterans face.

The following provides NACVSO's position and recommendations on the following bills:

- S.2896 Care Veterans Deserve Act of 2016
- S.____ (**Blumenthal**), Appeals Reform

S.2896, Care Veteran Deserve Act of 2016: Generally, NACVSO supports this bill with exceptions. This legislation does not provide additional financial resources necessary for permanently running a program as robust as Choice. Secondly it does not remedy the payment mechanism to community providers. The third party administrators have failed to pay claims promptly and thus have had negative credit implications on the veterans utilizing the service. While the VA is working to resolve these credit disputes, it is alarming that we would continue to utilize these contractors to implement this long term.

The expansion to pharmaceutical services is most certainly a step in the right direction. NACVSO encourages VA with the support of Congress to fund guaranteed 72-hour delivery of medications ordered on “my healthvet”. We believe that this mechanism would greatly enhance users ability to order medications when they realize the medication needs to be refilled without having to expend addition VA resources by calling and requesting urgent shipping.

Lastly, contracting with national chains of of walk-in clinics along with the elimination of pre authorization and co-pays would go a long way in improving the Veterans Choice Bill in practical application. Veterans frustrations are born of communicating with multiple parties to utilize services for medical services that urgent or semi-urgent in nature.

S.____ (Blumenthal), a bill to reform the rights and processes relating to appeals of decisions regarding claims for benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans

Affairs: NACVSO strongly supports appeals/claims reform. It does not need to be reiterated at how the current appeals process is a disservice to claimants, with a current inventory of 445,000 appeals and with no action the appeals inventory will surpass two million cases in the next decade. NACVSO is committed to continuing to work with the VA and service organization partners to aid in the expeditious treatment of veterans claims but not at the sacrifice of quality. We feel that this proposed language is the change we as local advocates need to ensure that their cases are heard and appropriately adjudicated in a timely fashion, while maintaining claimant rights under the current regulation.

This legislation does not propose a mechanism in which the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) can significantly reduce/eliminate their current inventory. NACVSO is in support of short term increased funding allocated to the BVA designated for this purpose. NACVSO also strongly recommends, if this is enacted that current claimants in the BVA claims inventory be given the option to opt into this new process. By doing so, the appeals inventory will be reduced while the veteran claimants are given the option of having their newly submitted evidence heard at the Agency of Original Jurisdiction (AOJ).