Paralyzed Veterans of America

Issue 10 • Volume 34 May 29, 2026

Washington Update

Check out the PVAction Force page to view legislative campaigns and a list of key legislation.

Advocating for PVA's Priority Legislation

During the second week of June, PVA chapter leaders and members will be in Washington, D.C. to meet with congressional leaders to push for action on legislation impacting veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D). They will share personal stories to demonstrate the importance of a list of key bills that would make critical improvements for our members and their families. These bills include:

S. 3647, the Disabled Veterans Dignity Act
This bill would create a permanent VA bowel and bladder care program for veterans with SCI/D. The bill expands caregiver support, standardizes services, and helps prevent serious health complications while improving veterans' independence and quality of life.

H.R. 6047, the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act
This bill would modernize Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) rates for severely disabled veterans and strengthen Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving families. The legislation aims to better reflect today's cost of living, address outdated benefit structures, and provide greater financial stability for veterans and their families.

We are pleased to share that H.R. 6047 has officially passed the House! On May 21, with PVA in attendance in the gallery, it passed 235–179. It will now move to the Senate for consideration. Thank you to everyone who contacted your Representatives in support of this bill.

H.R. 1685/S. 749, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act
This bill ensures the surviving spouses of veterans who died of service-connected ALS are eligible for increased survivor benefits. Surviving spouses of ALS veterans are rarely able to qualify for the DIC "kicker" because of the quick progression of the disease.

H.R. 6835/S. 3988, the Veterans STAND Act
This bill ensures veterans with SCI/D receive consistent, comprehensive health evaluations and are considered for innovative treatments that could enhance their mobility, independence, and quality of life.

You can find additional information on these bills, as well as PVA's petition opposing any efforts to cut the VA's SCI/D system of care, by visiting PVAction Force. If you're not joining us in Washington, D.C. for this year's Advocacy/Legislation Seminar, you can still participate from a distance by visiting this site to send a message to your elected officials, urging them to support these bills.

PVA Participates in EDF Convening

In mid-May, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation (EDF) held their 11th Annual National Convening. PVA is a proud EDF partner and joined them during several of their events. On May 18, National Legislative Director Morgan Brown and Associate Legislative Director Jeremy Villenueva joined staff from EDF, along with members of the Edmundson family, to advocate for the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act, which expands benefits for survivors and catastrophically disabled veterans.

The following day, EDF launched the National Blueprint for Action, a solutions-driven roadmap to strengthen the millions of families who care for those who served. PVA is pleased to be a co-chair of the "Supportive Ecosystems" pillar. You can watch the convening here.

Calling Attention to Veterans Research on Capitol Hill

On May 14, the National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations (NAVREF) and the Friends of VA Research (FOVA) co-hosted a Veterans Research Symposium titled, "Advancing Discovery for Those Who Served," at the Capitol Visitors Center. The symposium convened researchers, clinicians, advocates, and policymakers around a simple but urgent argument: veterans research is not optional. It is how America fulfills its obligation to understand, prevent, and treat the conditions borne by those who serve.

PVA's National Legislative Director, Morgan Brown, participated in a panel discussion during the symposium. He cited staffing shortages and the lack of stable funding streams as some of the chief limitations to VA's existing research programs. VA's hiring caps pose one of the greatest threats to research since 1946. Until recently, the department's strong partnerships with its academic affiliates enriched its research and clinical care. Now, many of those ties have been broken, or are disincentivized by requiring departments from hiring anything less than 100 clinical personnel.

The state of existing VA research facilities is also concerning. The department's health care facilities are on average more than 50–60 years old, with many dating back to the early to mid-20th century. The cost of fixing or remodeling them to address space issues, disability access, and electrical and information technology limitations will exceed $1 billion unless something is done soon.

In addition to being properly funded and staffed, he said Congress should focus on ways to improve data sharing among agencies and organizations with shared priorities. VA is sitting on a treasure trove of data that researchers should have access to. Finally, he talked about what a successful research program looks like. For some, that could mean finding a cure, while for others, it could simply mean a restoration of meaningful function.

HVAC Holds Second Hearing to Discuss Veterans Bills

Late last year, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) launched an effort to establish a "must-pass" authorization bill process for the VA, which would be like the one used to approve the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). PVA is generally supportive of efforts to establish a formal process, like the NDAA, but has some concerns about how this process will affect access to the services and benefits catastrophically disabled veterans depend on.

During a hearing in mid-March, HVAC examined nearly 30 pieces of pending legislation, which included several bills that would be cobbled together to develop the new authorization process. VA was the only witness at that hearing, although many veterans service organizations, including PVA, submitted statements for the record.

On May 20, HVAC held a second hearing looking at many of the same bills for VSOs and other interested parties. In his written and oral statement, PVA National Legislative Director Morgan Brown noted that many people recognize that the current defense authorization and appropriations process is broken. Politicization and disagreements over policy have led to delays in passing both the NDAA and defense appropriations bills. This

has resulted in many temporarily authorized programs expiring or being delayed as the result of congressional inaction. He told Congress we do not want veterans subjected to the same delays that military service members now experience.

PVA weighed in on most of the bills up for discussion during this hearing. Here is what we had to say on a few of them:

The VA National Formulary Act (H.R. 6580) creates statutory direction for VA's national drug formulary and establishes two oversight committees. It standardizes timelines for reviewing non-formulary drug requests and medication additions. PVA supports consistency and timely medication access for veterans, but we are concerned the new committee structure may add bureaucracy and that tiered copays could increase costs for veterans requiring specialized medications.

The VA Research Reform Act (H.R. 6583) creates a centralized VA research management system with tiered review processes, and standardized approval timelines. It also establishes clinical research hubs and requires reporting on implementation outcomes. Mr. Brown expressed our concern that this bill could undermine scientific independence, deprioritize basic research, and disadvantage research serving smaller veteran populations. To be clear, PVA supports improving accountability and ensuring that research translates into real benefits for veterans. Most important, we support creating "bench-to-bedside" funding mechanisms to move discoveries into clinical care faster.

PVA strongly supported the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration Act (H.R. 6843). This legislation creates a new VA administration focused on education, employment, transition, vocational rehabilitation, and housing adaptation programs. We believe this would increase visibility, oversight, staffing support, and innovation for these programs. It would also improve collaboration with other federal workforce and transition programs, while allowing the Veterans Benefits Administration to better focus on disability claims processing.

Mr. Brown told committee members that we opposed much of the Veterans Readiness and Employment Improvement Act (H.R. 6904) because we believe it adds bureaucracy and could unnecessarily delay the delivery of benefits. The bill could also reduce access for catastrophically disabled veterans, weaken counselor expertise standards, create inequities in housing allowances, and potentially harm veterans receiving Total Disability based on Individual Unemployability (TDIU).

He also spoke in favor of the Dental Care for Veterans Act (H.R. 210), which expands eligibility for VA dental care and the EVEST Act (H.R. 4114), which automatically enrolls eligible veterans into VA health. The transition from active duty to civilian life should be seamless, and the latter bill helps facilitate that transition.

In the Q&A portion of the hearing, Mr. Brown was asked to explain some of the reasons why the current way of funding VA infrastructure projects isn't meeting the needs of the VA spinal cord injuries and disorders system of care. The question likely stemmed from our general support of the Leasing and Infrastructure Act (H.R. 6599). PVA expressed support for the intent of this bill because we recognize that leasing is likely to be a more cost-effective measure to expand VA health care delivery. However, after reviewing VA's March 18 testimony on this legislation and speaking with Hill staff working on VA infrastructure needs, we agree with the department that the bill does not grant VA independent leasing authority. The committee will need to work with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to amend language within OMB Circular A-11 before that authority can be granted.

A recording of the hearing and related documents, including PVA's full statement, can be found here.

HOUSE T&I COMMITTEE ADVANCES SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION BILL

On May 22, the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure (T&I) advanced the markup of the Building Unrivaled Infrastructure and Long-term Development for America's 250th Act (BUILD America

250 Act), a bipartisan, five-year surface transportation reauthorization bill. Several sections in the reauthorization bill included provisions that would increase accessibility for people with disabilities. The bill includes permanent authorization of the All Stations Accessibility Program, which provides competitive federal grants to help entities increase access to legacy rail fixed guideway public transportation systems for passengers with disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs. In addition, it retains the Safe Streets and Roads for All program, which has been used to increase disability access.

Another section of the bill would allow for projects that improve access to VA facilities or an organization or a facility that provides services to veterans using VA funding. The bill also includes other provisions specifically focused on transit agencies making accessibility improvements for wheelchair users. Another section requires a study on autonomous vehicle accessibility. The bill now heads to the full House for consideration.

House E&C Committee Advances AV Bills

On May 21, the House Committee on Energy & Commerce (E&C) moved forward a bill that includes autonomous vehicles (AVs). Nearly no passenger AVs on the roads are wheelchair accessible. Unfortunately, none of the proposed bills require wheelchair accessible AVs. However, one bill, the Motor Vehicle Modernization Act of 2026 (H.R. 7389), requires a study on automated wheelchair securement systems. These systems could potentially be used in AVs to allow wheelchair users to independently use the vehicle.

The bill requires the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to conduct a study on automated wheelchair securement systems in motor vehicles. The bill would require DOT to submit a report within three years that includes an analysis of the feasibility of incorporating these automated wheelchair securement systems. However, the bill does not require any rulemaking requirements after the report is completed.

VA's Workforce: The Linchpin in Veterans' Access to Care and Benefits

On May 19, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and House Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA) hosted a roundtable to discuss the VA workforce, including issues with recruitment and retention, hiring process delays, and staffing shortages. Associate Legislative Director Jennifer Hunt was joined by representatives from the American Federation of Government Employees, National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations, National Federation of Federal Employees, National Nurses United, Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs, and Partnership for Public Service to discuss these important issues. Watch the recorded livestream here.

House Passes Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Budget

On May 15, the House passed the Fiscal Year 2027 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act by a bipartisan vote of 400–15, making it the first appropriations bill approved by the chamber. The legislation provides roughly $157 billion in discretionary funding for veterans' mental health, suicide prevention, homelessness programs, medical and prosthetic research, and community care services. The bill also funds military construction projects, barracks modernization, family housing, child development centers, and Department of Defense laboratory infrastructure.

HUD Issues Policy Rescinding Guidance on ESAs

On May 22, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published an enforcement guidance memo, Assessing Requests for the Use of an Animal as a Reasonable Accommodation Under the Fair Housing Act. The internal memo, effective immediately, permanently rescinds HUD's 2013 and 2020 emotional support animal (ESA) guidance. Combined, these documents instructed landlords on how to treat ESAs as assistance animals, including not typically charging pet fees or denying

housing to someone with an ESA, and what kinds of documentation they could and could not ask for. The documents no longer exist as guidance that HUD will follow or that housing providers and courts can rely on. The memo also removes the presumption that landlords must grant requests from tenants with disabilities with ESAs that have not been individually trained to perform disability-related work or tasks. Meaning that filing a complaint with HUD is no longer a meaningful option for ESA complaints. The Fair Housing Act (FHA) has not changed, only HUD's enforcement of the law for people with disabilities with ESAs.

This memo only applies to Fair Housing complaints. It does not apply to complaints filed under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act. Complaints filed under state laws are also not affected. Additionally, HUD intends to engage in a notice-and-comment rulemaking to update its animal regulations and hear public input from private and public housing providers.

Court Preliminarily Approves Settlement Agreement for Potential Hertz Vehicle Renters Who Use Hand Controls

A class action lawsuit was filed alleging Hertz Corporation, a rental car company, violated federal and state antidiscrimination laws by: (1) only placing hand controls in a limited set of vehicles; (2) effectively adding a surcharge for individuals who require hand controls; and (3) imposing a more difficult reservation process on individuals who require hand controls. In May 2026, the court preliminarily approved a settlement agreement in the pending class action.

The agreement requires Hertz to provide 20 minivans with left-side hand controls that will only be available for Hertz customers who need hand controls. Hertz must also continue to provide left-side and right-side hand controls in other vehicle categories. Under the settlement, Hertz must continue to ensure customers can reserve a rental vehicle with hand controls on its website, by phone, and in-person. Hertz will also be required to train its customer service representatives on hand controls; update its reservation systems and policies; and maintain a process for customers to request assistance about reservations with hand controls.

If you are a person with a disability who needs hand controls to operate a rental vehicle, and who will potentially rent a vehicle from Hertz, then you are a member of the proposed settlement class.

Information on the lawsuit can be found on the class notice website. For questions or additional information please email HertzSettlement@dralegal.org.

News of Note

Major Richard Star Act Update

On May 21, House Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA) and Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA) announced that they had filed a discharge petition to force a vote on the Major Richard Star Act in the House. Current law forces over 50,000 medically retired and combat-injured veterans to forfeit parts of their earned retirement pay to receive VA disability compensation. The Major Richard Star Act aims to remove this offset. However, despite having over 300 co-sponsors, the bill has never come up for a vote. The discharge petition would require 218 signatures to bring the bill to the floor. Currently, the petition has 157 signatures.

Week Two of ED Negotiated Rulemaking

PVA Associate Legislative Director Julie Howell participated in the second session of a Department of Education (ED) negotiated rulemaking the week of May 18. After almost a month of drafting proposals and engaging with other negotiators, the second session ended with consensus being reached on the final text drafted by ED. Two constituency groups voted to abstain from the final text, which means they did not support the final product as written, but they would not block consensus.

The final draft text would reduce barriers for new accreditors to enter the higher education space, change conflict of interest rules for accrediting agencies, and

require institutions to improve credit transfer acceptance, when appropriate. However, there are new hurdles for programmatic and institutional accreditors as the government places more compliance enforcement on agencies that previously focused solely on curriculum.

The draft language will be posted for public comment, and ED expects to have the new accreditation regulations rolled out in July of 2027.

SURVEYS AND COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

HERL Conducting Online Survey About Accessible Vehicles

The Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL), a collaboration between the University of Pittsburgh and the VA, is conducting an online survey to learn what vehicle features would make driving and travel easier for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices. By sharing your experiences and preferences, you'll help researchers understand what accessibility features matter most and provide feedback that could guide future vehicle designs. The survey will take less than 15 minutes to complete. To participate, please click here.

Veterans' Committee Activities

Please visit the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on previous and upcoming hearings and markups.