



# Washington Update

Check out the [PVAction Force](#) page to view alerts and a list of key legislation.

## PVA RELEASES 2024 POLICY PRIORITIES

The second session of the 118th Congress is officially underway. This year, we will continue to work with our champions on pushing forward legislation and regulations that support our priorities. Congress will be in session fewer days this year than last year because of the pending November elections. Regardless, we will work to push access forward this year and believe we will see some of our key priorities over the finish line.

Our priorities for this year are as follows:

- Protect Access to VA's Specialized Health Care Services
- Expand Access to VA Long-Term Services and Supports
- Improve VA Benefits and Health Care Services for Paralyzed Veterans and their Survivors
- Protect the Civil Rights of People with Disabilities
- Improve Access to Social Security Benefits
- Increase Employment Prospects for Veterans with Disabilities

For more details on each of the priorities, please [click here](#).

## CONGRESS PASSES CR TO FUND GOVERNMENT THROUGH MARCH

This week, Congress approved another two-tiered, continuing resolution (CR) that keeps the federal government running into early March. The first-tier funds the departments of Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, Energy, Veterans Affairs, and Agriculture through March 1. The second-tier funds all remaining government agencies through March 8. It cleared both chambers in a bipartisan manner.

## CONGRESS MAKING PROGRESS ON A VETERANS PACKAGE

Congress is making progress on an omnibus package for veterans that was intended to be an end of year package. Leaders of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees and their staff have been working for months on a baseline package which is currently in its first draft.

The final version of the bill is likely to differ from the draft due to cost and other barriers. The full details of the current package are unknown but we understand it will include several different pieces of legislation that cover an array of issue areas that are important to PVA members. Areas likely to be addressed include improving access to VA provided home and community-



based services and additional supports for caregivers, as well as provisions around education, and other benefits.

PVA is actively working with other veterans organizations and the committees to keep the package moving forward. As more progress is made on these efforts, we will keep you informed.

### **DOJ PUBLISHES PROPOSED ADA REGULATION TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO MDE**

On January 12, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) proposing to update the regulations for Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to improve access to medical diagnostic equipment (MDE) for people with disabilities. MDE includes weight scales, exam tables and chairs, x-ray machines, and mammography equipment. PVA has been urging DOJ to move forward with the proposed rule for a number of years.

The proposed regulation would adopt technical standards that clarify how public entities that use MDE, such as hospitals and health care clinics operated by state or local governments, can meet their existing obligations under the ADA. For a high-level summary of the NPRM and information on how to submit comments, [read the fact sheet](#). PVA will be submitting comments and will work with other disability community stakeholders to evaluate the proposal.

### **DOT EXTENDS DEADLINE FOR RFI ON TRANSIT FACILITY ACCESS, COVERING VERTICAL ACCESS**

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a [request for information](#) (RFI) for comments on whether to change the accessibility requirements for transportation facilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The DOT is specifically looking at changing requirements for vertical access, like elevators and long ramps between platforms; communications, such as in how people who are deaf and/or blind can receive information about upcoming trains; and

wayfinding, considering how people can use technology to navigate transit stations. Questions on vertical access seek comment on unreliable and frequently out of order elevators, potential requirement for facilities to have two elevators, and using ramps for accessible paths of travel. DOT will also accept comments on any other standards that govern rails stations, bus stops, and transfer stations, such as parking lots, fare vending machines, and accessible paths of travel. Comments can be submitted [online](#). The deadline was extended until February 20.

### **IMPROVEMENTS MADE TO TOTAL AND PERMANENT DISABILITY STUDENT LOAN DISCHARGE**

The U.S. Department of Education has been making improvements to the Total and Permanent Disability (TPD) Discharge of people with student loans and they want to get the word out to all eligible veterans. Several steps in the forgiveness process have now been streamlined to increase engagement.

There are three ways student loans can be discharged by the Department of Education due to TPD: through the VA, the Social Security Administration, or by a medical professional. For more information on eligibility for TPD forgiveness, you can review the criteria [here](#).

The Department of Education and VA have systems that communicate with one another so veterans rated 100 percent service connected should have seen an automatic discharge of their loans already. If you are rated at 100 percent and have not seen your federal student loans forgiven, or if you are a veteran that has seen your loans discharged, please reach out to Julie Howell, PVA's Associate Legislative Director, at [JulieH@PVA.org](mailto:JulieH@PVA.org).

### **NEWS OF NOTE**

#### **PVA Joins SVA National Convention**

During the first week of January, PVA was invited to participate in the National Convention (NatCon) for Student Veterans of America (SVA), the largest veteran

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service organization focused on student veterans, in Nashville, TN. PVA participated in several panel discussions including an education session on various veterans service organizations and their missions, as well as a policy think tank discussion where students were given the chance to think of creative solutions to issues they face. The event was a great opportunity to get the word out about PVA and the services we offer the veteran community.

### CFPB Wins Settlement for Some Veterans

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) recently sent \$6 million to veterans who were harmed by illegal lending practices. In a press release, CFPB noted that five companies “misled veterans and other consumers into selling their pension and disability payments, which is illegal under federal law.” You can read the press release [here](#). As a reminder, as fraud increases around veterans and service members, always research the financial companies you work with. You can use the CFPB website as a resource.

### IRS Piloting Service for Free E-Filing

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is piloting in 13 states the opportunity to use their free e-file system. This system is intended to make sure that taxpayers are taking advantage of the tax credits, including the [Earned Income Tax Credit](#), and deductions available to them and receiving the fullest tax refund possible. More information, including which states are participating in the pilot, can be found [here](#).

## WEBINARS, ACTION ALERTS, & HEARINGS

### Advocacy Webinar on Adaptive Housing Now Available

On December 14, we hosted a webinar, “Adaptive Housing: Various Resources for an Adaptive Home and an Independent Life,” focusing in on the many resources available to disabled veterans across the country. Julie Howell, Associate Legislative Director, was joined by PVA’s Architecture Department, the VA, and Habitat for Humanity to talk about resources and programs around

adaptive housing.

A recording of the webinar can be viewed [here](#) and the slides can be [viewed](#) on PVA’s webinar page.

### PVAction Force: Support HISA Improvements

Did you know that VA’s Home and Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grant rates have not changed since Congress last adjusted them in 2010? Meanwhile, due to inflation the cost of home modifications and labor has risen nearly 50 percent during the same timeframe. This is the only VA housing modification program available to veterans with non-service-connected disabilities. [Reach out to your members of Congress](#) and let them know they must pass the **Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act (H.R. 2818/S. 3290)**, which would raise the HISA rates to appropriate levels and tie them to a formula that raises rates annually.

### Upcoming Veterans’ Committee Activities

Please visit the [House](#) and [Senate](#) Veterans’ Affairs Committee webpages for information on upcoming hearings and markups.