



# Washington Update

Check out the [PVAAction Force](#) page to view legislative campaigns and a list of key legislation. [Sign the petition](#) in support of the VA's SCI/D system of care.

## HOUSE PASSES PVA-SUPPORTED LEGISLATION

On May 22, the House passed nine veterans-related bills, including two that address top PVA priorities. The first bill was the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act (H.R. 1147), which aims to enhance VA's accessibility for individuals with disabilities. It requires the VA to establish a new veterans advisory committee that would focus on improving access for disabled veterans to electronic information, benefits, services, health care facilities, and community care providers. The committee would issue reports identifying barriers and provide recommendations to improve accessibility.

Next, the House also passed the ASSIST Act of 2025 (H.R. 1364). Officially known as the Automotive Support Services to Improve Safe Transportation Act, this legislation aims to enhance the safety and mobility of disabled veterans by clarifying the vehicle modifications available to disabled veterans through VA's medical benefits package. Passage of this legislation would give VA greater flexibility to provide a wider range of vehicle modifications to meet veterans' needs.

A third bill of interest passed by the House was the CHIP IN for Veterans Act of 2025 (H.R. 217). This measure makes a pilot program established by the Communities Helping Invest through Property and Improvements Needed for Veterans Act of 2016 permanent. The CHIP

IN program allows local communities to assist with the planning and construction of VA health care facilities.

A complete list of the bills passed can be found [here](#).

## HOUSE HOLDS OVERSIGHT HEARING ON VA'S ADAPTIVE PROGRAMS

On May 21, PVA Associate Legislative Director Julie Howell testified at a House Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing held by the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee titled, "Pushing VA Forward: Review of VA's Adaptive Programs for Disabled Veterans."

The first panel was comprised of VA witnesses, including Mr. Jason Latona, Assistant Director of the Loan Guaranty Services for the Veterans Benefits Administration; Dr. Rachel McArdle, Deputy Executive Director for Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA); and Dr. Joel Scholten, Executive Director of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Services for VHA. The second panel witnesses were representatives from BraunAbility, Homes for our Troops, the Wounded Warrior Project, and PVA.

The policy areas covered during the hearing were VA's Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program, the



Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) program, and the VA Adaptive Sports Grant Program. PVA stressed the need for VA to make improvements for the delivery of benefits under both the AAE and SAH programs, highlighting barriers PVA members have experienced in accessing these programs. We also underscored the importance of adaptive sports for PVA members and other disabled veterans, drawing parallels to participation and improved mental health and clinical outcomes.

You can watch the hearing [here](#). You can read PVA's statement [here](#).

### Senate Hearing on Pending Veterans Legislation

On May 21, PVA testified before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee in a legislative hearing on 20 veterans-related bills. PVA's National Legislative Director Morgan Brown discussed several of the bills with committee members, including two that directly correlate to our top priorities. First, the DRIVE Act of 2025 (S. 599) would make VA's mileage reimbursement rate equal to or greater than the mileage reimbursement rate for government employees using private vehicles when no government vehicle is available. The difference between the two rates is significant. Under current regulations, VA only reimburses veterans when traveling for a VA health care appointment at a rate of \$0.41 per mile, which is far less than the \$0.70 per mile that government employees receive.

Next, Mr. Brown also spoke of our strong support for the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2025 (S. 1383). This bill directs the VA to create an advisory committee on issues relating to the accessibility of VA benefits, services, and facilities for veterans and employees with mobility, hearing, visual, cognitive, or other disabilities. PVA members routinely face disability-access barriers when it comes to accessing care at the VA and within the community. Veterans also encounter inaccessible medical diagnostic equipment (MDE). This includes equipment like medical examination tables, weight scales, dental chairs, x-ray machines, mammography equipment, and other imaging

equipment. In 2017, the U.S. Access Board, published new accessibility standards for MDE. As soon as the new standards were issued, the VA proactively said they would adopt the new standards to ensure that the needs of disabled veterans were met. Since that time, we have received no updates from the VA on the status of implementing the MDE accessibility standards, and we have been unable to determine the extent of the department's progress. Passing this legislation would help ensure VA's facilities and programs are better prepared to welcome, accept, and care for disabled veterans and employees by placing disability access at the forefront. We urged Congress to pass this legislation as soon as possible.

Other legislation of interest included a pair of PVA-endorsed bills that would improve VA's Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG) program. The Rural Veterans Transportation to Care Act (S. 784) expands eligibility for the department's HRTG program to both rural and highly rural counties. The "highly rural" definition of seven persons per square mile is unique to this VA program, and is quite restrictive, applying to very few areas in the country (e.g., North Dakota has some counties that meet the definition). This legislation would also increase the maximum amount of funding grant recipients are eligible for from \$50,000 to \$60,000, or up to \$80,000 for grantees to purchase an ADA-compliant vehicle. The other bill, the Supporting Rural Veterans Access to Healthcare Services Act (S. 827), would extend HRTG eligibility to tribal and Native Hawaiian organizations. It also addresses some of the financial limitations of the current program by allowing for an increase in the maximum grant amount for counties with more than five communities that are off the road system. This change would acknowledge the additional logistical challenges faced by veterans in these remote areas and provide more substantial support to overcome transportation barriers. Finally, it eliminates the existing funding cap of \$3 million per year, replacing it with such "sums as may be necessary for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2029." This last change would ensure the program is truly funded based on veterans' actual needs in that area, not some arbitrary amount.

PVA also gave its strong endorsement to the CHAMPVA Children's Care Protection Act (S. 605). For most

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Americans with health insurance, their adult children can remain on their plan until age 26 with no separate premium, as mandated in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). That is not the case with the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA). Coverage for children under CHAMPVA currently expires when they turn 18 unless they are full-time students. In this case, they continue to receive coverage until they turn 23, stop attending school full-time, or get married. CHAMPVA and the military's TRICARE programs were not affected by the ACA, so they required separate congressional action to extend these benefits to children up to age 26. Congress addressed this discrepancy for TRICARE in 2011, but they have yet to act on similar legislation that would make the change for CHAMPVA. The delay has adversely impacted many PVA members and Mr. Brown urged Congress to address this inequity.

Finally, the committee reviewed and discussed the Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement (3R) Act (S. 879), which would provide greater support for the family caregivers of veterans. It would ensure family caregivers enrolled in CHAMPVA remain enrolled for up to 180 days following their dismissal from the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, unless they have been dismissed for fraud, abuse, or mistreatment. Other provisions in the bill would offer bereavement counseling, job training assistance, and help with professional relicensing costs to help caregivers ease into the workforce or into retirement once their time as a caregiver has concluded. Caregivers are often the most important component of rehabilitation and maintenance for veterans with catastrophic disabilities and their welfare directly affects the quality-of-care veterans receive. We urged Congress to quickly pass this bill as well.

A complete list of the bills and a recording of the hearing can be found [here](#).

## NEWS OF NOTE

### VA Streamlines Access to Community Care

On May 19, the [VA announced](#) it was implementing changes to make it easier for VA-enrolled veterans to access community care through VA. The VA MISSION Act allowed veterans to access health care from non-VA providers at the department's expense when it is in their best medical interest. However, such decisions had to be reviewed by a second VA doctor, even when the veteran and the veteran's doctor agreed that a community care referral was in the veteran's best interest. The Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act required VA to eliminate the secondary review.

### Update: *Texas v. Kennedy* Section 504 Case

*Texas v. Kennedy* (formerly known as *Texas v. Becerra*) is a lawsuit filed by 17 states challenging the 2024 Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) regulations from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). One of the issues originally alleged in the suit was that the Section 504 statute is unconstitutional. As of April 11, the 17 states have stated that they no longer seek to challenge the constitutionality of the Section 504 statute. This means the Texas district court will no longer rule on whether Section 504 is constitutional. Although the states are no longer challenging the constitutionality of the statute, the 17 states continue to challenge the Section 504 regulations on other grounds. These regulations address many different topics, including the right to receive services in the community instead of institutions, preventing discrimination in medical care, and requiring accessible medical equipment. The next court filing is due on July 21. PVA will continue to monitor the case and will provide updates as they come.

### PVA Meets with Amtrak's Board of Directors

On May 22, PVA's Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley attended Amtrak's annual meeting with representatives from the disability community. Amtrak's Board of Directors, including board member David Capozzi who serves in the seat designated for a disability advocate,

and the Executive Leadership Team participated in the meeting with disability community leaders. Amtrak provided an overview of their efforts to make train travel more accessible for passengers with disabilities. Future changes include more stations with level boarding and new train sets that will feature enhanced accessibility.

## **SURVEY & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES**

### **Seeking Potential Class Members in Lawsuit Against Car Rental Company**

Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) filed a class action lawsuit against Hertz for failing to provide hand controls in most of the types of vehicles they offer for rent. DRA is seeking policy changes on behalf of a proposed class of people with mobility disabilities. If you have ever tried to rent a vehicle with hand controls from Hertz but could not get the type of vehicle you wanted, DRA wants to hear from you! DRA has put together a simple survey to collect potential class members' contact information. DRA will contact everyone who fills out the form. You can access the survey [here](#). You can learn more about this lawsuit on [DRA's Ho v. The Hertz Corporation webpage](#).

### **Veterans' Committee Activities**

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