



# Washington Update

Check out the [PVAAction Force](#) page to view legislative campaigns and a list of key legislation.

## HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINES VR&E PROGRAM

On April 16, the House Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee held an oversight hearing on the Veteran Readiness and Employment program (VR&E). VR&E assists disabled veterans in finding meaningful and lasting employment, despite incurring disabilities or illnesses due to their military service. The services and supports available to veterans with catastrophic disabilities through VR&E are critical to ensuring successful employment outcomes and long-term independence.

PVA Associate Legislative Director Julie Howell was invited to testify at the hearing, and she relayed some of our broader concerns with the program. She spoke about the fundamental misunderstanding that often exists with veterans, VA, and Congress alike about what the VR&E Program is supposed to do for veterans. Although it is an employment program, most veterans believe VR&E exists to help them return to school or address needs related to starting their own business. Many veterans also don't understand the role of a vocational rehabilitation counselor, or VRC. A VRC is trained to help veterans find suitable, sustainable, and financially sufficient employment that will sustain them through their lives, not just for a handful of years after leaving the program.

Ms. Howell also spoke of the growing number of administrative burdens being placed on the VRCs, which detract from their ability to perform their principal function, which is counseling. She expressed the need for VA to hire staff that can take care of these functions to free up VRCs' time. Reducing administrative burdens would allow VRCs to focus on the work of employment counseling, particularly for veterans with complex disabilities.

She further noted that PVA and other veterans organizations have long requested additional appropriations from Congress to meet the demands of the program in the face of exponentially increasing enrollment. These requests have mostly gone unheard. As a result, veterans continue to experience long wait times and struggle to contact their counselors.

Ms. Howell expressed PVA's concern that the VR&E program is experiencing a perfect storm of high case volume, understaffing, and an enormous amount of administrative burden. Morale is low, demand is high, and VRCs are close to burning out. If something isn't done to address these issues, veterans will likely wait even longer to get into the program. Enrolled veterans may also experience delayed payments and other negative effects that could impact their long-term wellbeing.



Her testimony concluded with a few recommendations to improve the program. First, the VR&E program should consider hiring additional support staff to help reduce the administrative burden that is falling heavily on counselors' shoulders. Next, she recommended that the VA create national specialty teams for complex service tracks such as retroactive inductions, self-employment, and independent living. She also noted that the department should end its current practice of mandatory overtime and revert to offering it on a voluntary basis to prevent VRC burnout.

Finally, she told Congress that VA needs to ensure that its new case management system, the Readiness and Employment System, is fully operational before it is deployed. A national rollout of an IT project that doesn't have all the bugs worked out may fracture the workforce in a way that will have profound and lasting ramifications for veterans.

A recording of the hearing and all relevant documents, including PVA's written statement, can be found [here](#).

### **PVA ADVOCATES FOR INVESTMENT IN SCI/D RESEARCH**

Using lessons learned from last year's battles over funding for spinal cord injury and disorder (SCI/D) research, PVA's National Legislative Director Morgan Brown and Associate Legislative Director Jennifer Hunt have been meeting with colleagues across research advocacy organizations to coordinate messaging that underscores the importance of investing in this research.

SCI/D research is funded through a variety of programs, spanning the Department of Defense (DOD), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Department of Health and Human Services. NIH leads in basic science, DOD drives high-risk and translational work through its Spinal Cord Injury Research Program (SCIRP), and VA integrates research directly into clinical care for veterans with SCI/D.

House appropriators are beginning work on their annual defense appropriations bill. Provisions in that legislation typically allocate funds for SCIRP through the

Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP). For fiscal year 2027, organizations representing the SCI/D community will be seeking \$80 million for ALS; \$50 million for SCI; and \$22 million for MS research. It's early in the annual budgetary process and Congress will likely rely on temporary funding legislation to keep the government running for a while into the new fiscal year.

### **PORTIONS OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S FY 2027 BUDGET PROPOSAL REVEALED**

Earlier this month, the administration released part of the President's Budget, an annual proposal that outlines how the administration believes taxpayer dollars should be spent in the next fiscal year (FY). The released document, known as a "skinny budget," does not list all spending amounts in all areas of the federal government.

The administration recommended \$488 billion for the VA in FY 2027. If approved by Congress, that amount would represent a 7.7 percent increase compared to the current year. The administration says this amount would support a growing veteran population, including more than 7.4 million veterans receiving disability benefits and 9.2 million enrolled in VA health care. Details about key investments will be known later, but the administration says they will focus on medical infrastructure, homelessness prevention, community care, and the continued restart of the electronic health record modernization effort.

PVA was pleased to see the budget proposed a workforce of approximately 443,000 VA employees, slightly below 2025 levels, but an increase from 2026. PVA has always supported VA having the appropriate staffing levels, especially at their SCI/D centers. National President Robert Thomas relayed this need during his testimony before a Joint House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing in March.



## **EO SUBCOMMITTEE LOOKS AT THE VA HOME LOAN GUARANTY PROGRAM**

On March 26, the House Veterans' Affairs Economic Opportunity (EO) Subcommittee held an oversight hearing on "Lowering Costs for Veteran Families Through the VA Home Loan Program." Representing the VA were the new director of Home Loan Guaranty Services, Patrick Zondervan, along with Terry Rouch, the assistant director for loan policy and valuation. Other witnesses included representatives from the Mortgage Bankers Association, the National Association of Realtors, and the National Consumer Law Center.

The theme of the hearing was affordability and ways to improve the VA home loan that would make it more appealing for veterans and active service members. There was also discussion about the VA's delayed roll out of the Partial Claims Program that is being developed after the passage of H.R. 1815, the VA Home Loan Program Reform Act in 2025.

A video of the hearing and relevant documents can be found [here](#).

## **SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING HOLDS HEARING ON SENIORS AND THE WORKFORCE**

The Senate's Special Committee on Aging held a hearing titled, "Experience Matters: Seniors and the Workforce," in late March. While not a veteran specific hearing, the conversation that occurred will impact veterans who choose to work after retirement age. One of the main topics discussed by senators and witnesses was the removal of the Retirement Earnings Test (RET). The RET is a temporary withholding by the Social Security Administration that impacts senior workers and is often confusing to beneficiaries.

Another topic discussed at the hearing was passing a tax credit for caregivers. While not specifically mentioned during the hearing, S. 925, the Credit for Caring Act of 2025, would create a new, non-refundable tax credit of up to \$5,000 for working family caregivers to help address the financial impact of caregiving. The hearing

was informative, and you can watch a recording of it [here](#).

## **STATES CONTINUE TO CONSIDER LAWS TO ISSUE DISABILITY PARKING PERMITS TO EXPECTANT MOTHERS**

States are considering and passing laws to allow the issuance of temporary disability parking placards and permits to expectant mothers. These permits allow expectant mothers to park in accessible parking spaces generally reserved for people with disabilities. For example, Florida passed a law that offers temporary disability parking permits to expectant mothers at any point during the pregnancy. The permit is valid for up to one year. However, on October 27, 2025, a federal lawsuit was filed alleging that the law infringes on the rights of people with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The state's motion to dismiss was granted, but the case is ongoing for an appeal. In the meantime, the state senate passed a bill to repeal the law, but the state house rejected the repeal. The legislature adjourned without repealing the law, but intends to look at the issue again next session.

Florida is not the only state that provides expectant mothers disability parking placards. In Illinois, an expectant mother in her third trimester can obtain a parking placard that is valid for 90 days. Other states are considering similar laws. Legislators in Ohio were considering a bill to allow expectant mothers to park in accessible parking spaces, but this bill is not expected to move further in the lawmaking process. Furthermore, bills in New Jersey and New York also appear to be stalled. A bill was introduced in Utah, but it was voted down and died at the end of the state's legislative session. A bill was also introduced in Tennessee, but it was recently amended to restrict the parking permits to females whose pregnancy has been certified to be high risk by her physician. The permit would be valid for the duration of her condition, with a maximum of six months. Disability advocacy continues in all states considering these new laws.



## NEWS OF NOTE

### **VA Withdraws Appeal of *Ingram v. Collins***

The government has withdrawn their appeal of *Ingram v. Collins*, and the Federal Circuit has officially dismissed the appeal. *Ingram v. Collins* is a landmark decision holding that the VA must disregard the positive effects of medication when rating musculoskeletal disabilities. The ruling requires evaluating a veteran's baseline, unmedicated impairment. In their appeal, the government had been seeking to overturn not just *Ingram*, which applied to musculoskeletal disabilities, but the whole line of cases on which it is based. With the appeal withdrawn, this concludes (for now) the VA's attempts to give lower ratings across the entire VA ratings schedule to veterans who use medication to help treat their conditions.

### **PVA Partners to Bring Grassroots Training to Members**

On April 7, PVA partnered with the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation and the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) on their Regional Advocacy Training event in Oklahoma City. Lisa Elijah, Grassroots Advocacy Manager, represented PVA National at the training. Each group spoke about their organization's impact on the national and local level and explored different facets of grassroots advocacy. The training focused on the essential role of grassroots advocacy in local communities, provided an overview of the resources available through each organization, and gave some examples of ways advocates can share their stories and get involved. Scott Ellis, Government Relations Director with PVA's Mid-America Chapter, shared insights into his personal journey with advocacy and the legislative accomplishments he has achieved along the way. The training finished with sharing ways to stay engaged in advocacy efforts from each organization.

## SURVEYS AND COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

### **REMINDER: FAA Survey for People with Disabilities About Aircraft Evacuation**

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has launched a survey to gather feedback from passengers with

disabilities regarding aircraft evacuations. The lack of research into the evacuation process for passengers with disabilities in air travel is a source of significant concern. Please provide FAA with your feedback [here](#).

### **Veterans' Committee Activities**

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

