

# 2021 Legislative Session Bill Summaries

Federal Bills That Impact Veterans

<https://www.congress.gov/committee/senate-veterans-affairs/ssva00>

## HR 2911

Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to submit a plan for obligating and expending covered funds, which are funds made available to the VA for response to COVID-19

Requires the VA to submit biweekly reports regarding obligations, expenditures, and planned uses of the funds until seven days after the VA has expended all covered funds

Inspector General of VA must submit reports examining the obligations and expenditures made using covered funds during the specified reporting period

Government Accountability Office (GAO) must submit an interim report and final report containing a review of obligations and expenditures made using covered funds

## HR 2523

Updates the VA training and education policies and programs, including amendments to the American Rescue Plan of 2021 and the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020

Requires the list of high-demand occupations be prepared in conjunction with the Department of Labor. The VA may add and remove occupations as appropriate.

The GAO must report on the outcomes and effectiveness of the retraining program.

The VA must provide veterans and members of the Armed Forces with information about whether (1) a postsecondary education institution is listed on

the College Navigator website as being affiliated with a certain religion, (2) an institution is minority serving, and (3) an institution is gender specific.

#### HR 2441

Requires the VA, during FY2022, to establish and maintain three new centers of the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (RANGE) Program in areas with interest from personnel and a need for additional mental health care for rural veterans. The RANGE Program serves veterans in rural areas who are experiencing mental illness.

The bill requires the GAO to conduct a study and report on whether the VA has sufficient resources to serve rural veterans who need mental health care that is more intensive than traditional outpatient therapy.

#### HR 2093

Requires the VA to make all its facts sheets available in English, Spanish, Tagalog, and each of the 10 most spoken languages not listed.

Requires the VA to establish a publicly available website that provides links to all VA fact sheets.

Requires VA report to Congress regarding the utilization of such fact sheets as well as the details of the Language Access Plan of the VA.

#### HR 1510

Requires the VA to report on its policies and procedures relating to the usage and maintenance of video cameras for patient safety and law enforcement at VA medical facilities.

#### HR 1448

Implements a program and a policy related to service dog therapy for veterans.

Requires the VA to implement a five-year pilot program to provide canine training to eligible veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder as an element of complementary and integrative health program. Eligible veterans are those who are enrolled in the VA health care system and have been recommended for participation by a qualified mental health care provider or clinical team.

Veterans who participate in the program are authorized to adopt the dog they assisted in training if their health provider determines it is in the best interest of the veteran. The bill authorizes the VA to provide service dogs to veterans with mental illnesses, regardless of whether they have a mobility impairment.

The VA must establish processes to document and track progress of participating veterans with respect to health benefits and improvements.

The GAO must brief Congress and submit a report on the program.

#### S 1095

Requires the VA to disapprove courses of education provided by public institutions of higher learning if such institutions charge a higher rate of tuition and fees than in-state tuition for individuals who are entitled to educational assistance under the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance program.

#### S 1031

Requires GAO to conduct a study that assesses whether there are disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to (1) compensation benefits administered by the VA, (2) disability ratings determined by the VA, and (3) the rejection of fully developed claims for VA benefits. The GAO must also develop recommendations to facilitate better data collection on such disparities associated with race and ethnicity.

Within one year, the GAO must brief Congress on the initial results of the study. The GAO must also submit a final report on the study following the briefing.

#### S 957

Requires the VA to designate period during which any individual may dispose of controlled substances medications at VA medical facilities with an on-site pharmacy or physical location dedicated for law enforcement purposes.

The bill also authorizes the VA to carry out public information campaigns regarding the designated disposal periods.

#### S 894

Requires the VA to consult with the Department of Defense (DOD) to identify and refer members of the Armed Forces with health care occupations for employment with the VA during their separation from the Armed Forces.

The VA must refer interested members to a recruiter for consideration of open positions in the member's specialty and geography of interest. Referrals must not be made earlier than one year before the member's separation from the Armed Forces.

#### S 796

Requires the VA to implement the maternity care coordination program. The VA must provide community maternity care providers with training and support with respect to the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum veterans, particularly regarding mental and behavioral health conditions in relation to the service of the veterans in the Armed Forces.

GAO must report on maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity among pregnant and postpartum veterans, with a focus on racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health outcomes for veterans

#### S 189

Requires the VA to increase the accounts payable for wartime disability compensations, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children.

The VA must increase the amounts by the same percentage as the cost-of-living increase in benefits for Social Security recipients that is effective on December 1, 2021. The bill requires the VA to publish the amounts payable, as increased, in the Federal Register.

The VA is authorized to make a similar adjustment to the rates of disability compensation payable to persons who have not received compensation for service-connected disability or death.

#### HR 7105

Addresses the employment and retraining of veterans and the administration of the VA programs and Benefits for homeless veterans, specifically during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

#### HR 4356

Revises the conditions allowing a service member to terminate a commercial mobile, telephone exchange, internet access, or multichannel video programming service contract at any time after the date the service member receives military orders to relocate for at least 90 days to a location that does not support such contract.

It treats as individuals covered, and therefore allowed to terminate such a contracts (1) a spouse or dependent of a service member who dies while in military service or a member of the reserve components performing full-time or active reserve duty or inactive-duty training; (2) a spouse or dependent of a service member who incurs a catastrophic injury or illness while in military service or performing such a duty; and (3) a member of the reserve components performing such duty

#### HR 4183

Requires the GAO to study and report on disability and pension benefits provided by the VA to members of the National Guard and members of reserve components of the Armed Forces.

#### S 2216

Revises the administration of the VA caregiver programs by requiring the VA to report on the feasibility and advisability of formally recognizing caregivers of veterans by identifying them in the veteran's electronic health record.

Such caregivers covered by the bill include those approved as a provider of personal care services under the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and those participating in the Program of General Caregiver Support Services.

Requires the VA to use standardized letters to notify veterans, their caregivers, and applicants for the program regarding decisions affecting the furnishing of

assistance under the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. Such notifications must contain specified details regarding the decision.

Authorizes the VA to extend benefits for a 90-day period under the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, including the monthly personal caregiver stipend, after determining that a veteran is no longer eligible for the program solely because of improvement in their condition. The effective date of discharge from the program shall not be earlier than 60 days after the date on which the VA provides notice of the lack of eligibility.

#### HR 4958

(Sec. 2) Directs the VA to increase, as of December 1, 2018, the rates of veterans' disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouse's children.

Each such increase shall be the same percentage as the increase in benefits provided under title II of the Social Security Act, on the same effective date.

#### HR 3656

(Sec. 1) Expands eligibility for memorial headstones and markers provided by the VA to certain family members of veterans. Eligibility for dependent children and remarried spouses whose remains are unavailable is expanded to include all those who die on or after November 11, 2001.

#### HR 3562

(Sec. 1) Authorizes the VA to assist a veteran with a service-connected disability who is in the vocational rehabilitation and employment program to acquire necessary residential adaptations. Such assistance may not be provided if it would result in a duplication of benefits.

The aggregate amount of assistance available to a veteran may not exceed \$77,307. The VA may waive this limitation if necessary for a veteran's rehabilitation program. The VA shall: (1) increase assistance limits annually, and (2) beginning on October 1, 2019, submit a biennial report on the use of such waiver authority.

VA is not required to provide mortgage life insurance to an individual under the age of 70 with a service-connected disability who receives adaptive residential assistance under this bill.