



# Washington Update

Check out the [PVAAction Force](#) page to view our latest alerts and a list of key legislation and its status.

## **PASSAGE OF PACT ACT DELAYED**

In the last Washington Update, we reported that the Senate had passed H.R. 3967, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 or PACT Act, a comprehensive legislative package that will deliver all generations of toxic-exposed veterans their long-overdue VA health care and benefits. Unfortunately, House action on the bill has been delayed due to a parliamentary issue. Further action hinges on addressing it. Congressional champions are continuing to work on a solution. Both the House and Senate are now on recess; so, final passage will not take place until later in July at the earliest.

## **SENATE ANNOUNCEMENT SPELLS END OF AIR PROCESS**

On June 27, a bipartisan group of Senators released a statement announcing their opposition to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission moving forward. The VA MISSION Act of 2018 required the VA to conduct a nationwide study and issue recommendations for future investments in VA health care facilities to the AIR Commission (PVA Executive Director Carl Blake was nominated by the White House to serve on the commission). This announcement effectively spells the end of the AIR process.

PVA National President Charles Brown released a statement noting our concerns with the “delays in standing up the AIR Commission” and also our “ongoing concerns regarding the validity of VA’s recommendations and the data on which they rested.” President Brown also called on Congress to pass “needed reforms to help VA better manage its infrastructure and provide significant financial investments to ensure that the SCI/D system of care and the broader VA health care system are able to fully meet the needs of all catastrophically disabled veterans, their families, and caregivers.”

## **PVA TESTIFIES ON PENDING LEGISLATION**

On June 22, PVA Associate Legislative Director Julie Howell testified before the House Veterans’ Affairs Health Subcommittee on six pending bills, including H.R. 1957, the Veterans Infertility Treatment Act. This important bill would allow the VA to recognize infertility as a medical condition, therefore, allowing infertility treatments to be available to all veterans enrolled in the Veterans Health Administration whether their infertility was service connected or not. It also would allow veterans with infertility to utilize donated gametes, a must for anyone who has a genital injury and is unable to produce viable genetic material on their own.

Assisted reproductive technology is an extraordinary medical advancement that allows people with infertility to fulfill their dreams of a family. Ms. Howell urged



Congress to pass this bill quickly and expressed hope that they would act to provide access to surrogacy as well.

PVA also offered its support for H.R. 6273, the VA Zero Suicide Demonstration Project Act, which would allow the VA to establish a pilot program to help combat veteran suicide, and H.R. 7589, the REMOVE Copays Act, which would eliminate copays for a veteran's first three annual mental health appointments. The only bill PVA did not endorse was H.R. 1216, the Modernizing Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Act, which seeks to establish a 15-member, bipartisan commission to assess veterans' eligibility for VA health care. The bill lacked clarity on why an outside panel was needed and we strongly believe Congress should continue to exercise its exclusive authority to conduct oversight of the VA health care system which includes eligibility.

You can watch a recording of the hearing [here](#) and read PVA's written statement [here](#). To send a letter to your Representative in support of H.R. 1957, click [here](#).

### **MTA COMMITS TO A 95 PERCENT ACCESSIBLE SUBWAY SYSTEM BY 2055**

New York Governor Kathy Hochul (D) and disability advocates reached a class action settlement agreement affirming the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) commitment towards an accessible New York City subway system. The agreement is a result of two class action lawsuits and is still subject to court approval. Under the agreement, MTA will add elevators or ramps to create a stair-free path of travel at 95 percent of the currently inaccessible subway stations by 2055. Currently, only 131 stations in the transit system are fully accessible via elevators and ramps. The agreement includes making 81 more subway stations accessible by 2025, another 85 accessible by 2035, 90 more by 2045, and the last 90 by 2055. The remaining 5 percent that will not be made accessible have engineering issues that would make adding elevators or ramps difficult, and in some cases, impossible.

### **FTA FUNDS IMPROVE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FOR UNDERSERVED GROUPS**

On June 16, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced awards of approximately \$8.4 million to [17 projects in 16 states](#) to improve public transportation for underserved groups, with a focus on health and wellness. FTA's [Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility \(ICAM\) Pilot Program](#) – which received millions more in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – increases access for Americans all over the country, particularly to health care appointments, by building partnerships among health, transportation, and other service providers. By improving the coordination of transportation to critical services for people who have been underserved in the past, ICAM supports the Administration's commitment to improving public health, including mental health. As part of the total to be awarded through the ICAM program, \$4.6 million came through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

### **MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL AIRPORT ADDS TRAVEL EXPERIENCE CENTER WITH MOCK AIRCRAFT CABIN**

A new Travel Confidently MSP Education Center was recently unveiled at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP). This one-of-a-kind facility features a mock aircraft cabin to support airport and public safety training and serve airport programs that help build travel confidence through pre-flight experiences.

The Travel Confidently MSP Education Center will serve multiple purposes, most notably enhancing the Navigating MSP Program, which provides flyers with sensory, physical, or cognitive disabilities, or those with a fear of flying, a place to practice boarding and gives service dogs the ability to become familiar with the surroundings of an aircraft cabin. It will also allow airport public safety professionals and airline support crews to further train in a realistic setting.

The new space features a 33-foot-long mock aircraft cabin that was previously used to train Delta's in-flight teams in Atlanta. The components of the former training cabin, and 42 seats from a retired Boeing 737, were

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shipped to MSP and reassembled in its new space. For more information, click [here](#).

### **INCLUSIVE HOME DESIGN ACT INTRODUCED IN SENATE**

The Senate version of the Inclusive Home Design Act was introduced on June 22 by Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL). Like its House companion, H.R. 4695, introduced last year by Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), S. 4447 would require all newly constructed, federally assisted, single-family houses and townhouses to meet minimum standards of “visitability” for persons with disabilities. Under current law, accessibility standards apply largely to multifamily housing and studies have shown that affordable, accessible housing is in very short supply. (See [How Well Does the Housing Stock Meet Accessibility Needs? An Analysis of the 2019 American Housing Survey | Joint Center for Housing Studies \(harvard.edu\)](#)) The bill, which PVA supports, was referred to the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee.

### **BILL TO PROTECT VETERANS AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES FROM HOUSING DISCRIMINATION INTRODUCED IN SENATE**

On June 23, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA), introduced S. 4485, the Fair Housing Improvement Act of 2022. PVA has endorsed this legislation that would protect veterans and low-income families from housing discrimination. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability. S. 4485 would add source of income and veteran status to the list of protected classes. It would prohibit landlords from denying housing to individuals who use Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers, benefits received through Social Security, income received by a court order, payment from a trust or guardian, or any other lawful source of income. Companion legislation was introduced as H.R. 8213 on the same day by Representative Scott Peters (D-CA).

### **ABLE AGE ADJUSTMENT ACT INCLUDED IN EARN ACT**

In its markup of the Enhancing American Retirement Now (EARN) Act on June 22, the Senate Finance

Committee included language from the ABLE Age Adjustment Act. Under current law, ABLE accounts are tax-advantaged savings and retirement instruments that are available to individuals who acquire their disabilities prior to age 26. The bipartisan ABLE Age Adjustment Act, which PVA supports, would allow people who develop their disabilities before age 46 to establish ABLE accounts, allowing them to save for future expenses without placing needed disability services, health care, and income support at risk. The EARN Act, to which the bill was attached, makes enhancements to workplace savings plans and contains some provisions that are the same as or similar to those proposed in the House, which passed the Securing a Strong Retirement Act (H.R. 2954) in late March in a bipartisan 414-5 vote. If passed by the full Senate, differences in the two versions would need to be reconciled before going to the President for his signature.

### **HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE APPROVES VA SPENDING BILL**

On June 23, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations approved its fiscal year (FY) 2023 VA funding bill. The measure provides a total of \$135 billion in discretionary appropriations for the VA, an increase of \$22.8 billion above the 2022 enacted level but about \$46 million below the President’s budget request. \$118 billion of that amount would go directly toward veterans’ medical care, an increase of \$21.8 billion above the 2022 enacted level and \$66 million above the budget request. Spending on gender-specific care for women veterans (\$911 million) as well as medical and prosthetics research (\$926 million) could increase significantly if this version of the bill is adopted by Congress as a whole. Also included in the bill is language making the availability of in vitro fertilization part of VA’s regular medical services package and it would allow the use of donated gametes and embryos. More information about the bill’s VA provisions is available [here](#).

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## HOUSE PASSES STRONG ACT

Recently, the House passed H.R. 6411, the Support the Resiliency of Our Nation's Great (STRONG) Veterans Act of 2022, which is a comprehensive mental health package comprised of several smaller House and Senate bills. The bill seeks to increase and improve training for VA's mental health provider workforce as well as shore up the Veterans Crisis Line to meet the projected surge of callers when a new 3-digit hotline number (988) goes live in July. Other provisions require explicit mental health and suicide prevention outreach by the VA to traditionally underserved veteran populations, including Native veterans; expanded peer mental health services to reach more veterans; open eligibility for Vet Center services to more student veterans and families who have lost veterans to suicide; and increased mental health research. The bill now awaits Senate approval.

## NEWS OF NOTE

### Disability Employment Awareness Month Theme Announced

The Department of Labor recently announced that "Disability: Part of the Equity Equation" will be the theme for October's observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Led by its Office of Disability Employment Policy, the department's annual celebration acknowledges the contributions to the nation's economy made by workers with disabilities, current and past. The commemoration also showcases supportive and inclusive policies and practices benefiting workers and employers. The announcement of NDEAM 2022 can be found [here](#). Resources and celebration tool kits will be posted on the site in the near future.

### VA Can Help Veterans Access Telehealth Services

If you would benefit from video telehealth services but do not have internet access or a video-capable device, the VA may be able to help. Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Help for Caregivers

[The Building Better Caregivers®](#) is a six-week online workshop developed by Stanford University to help those who care for veterans reset, recharge, and discover new information so they can be the best caregiver they can be. Click on the link above to learn more.

### VA Adopts Login.gov for a Unified Veteran Sign-in Experience

By creating an account on [Login.gov](#), veterans can now use the same login and password to access a growing list of federal government websites, including VA.gov, My HealtheVet and VA's new [Health and Benefits mobile app](#). Login.gov is a secure digital credentialing system operated by the General Services Administration's Technology Transformation Services. Click on [Login.gov](#) to learn more.

## HEARINGS & CHATS

### New Audio Chat Available

PVA National Advocacy Director Susan Prokop and PVA Advocacy Attorney Danica Gonzalves recently held an Audio Chat with Becoming RentABLE CEO/Founder Lorraine Woodward. Becoming RentABLE focuses on accessible short-term vacation rental properties. To listen to the Chat or read the transcript, please [click here](#).

### Upcoming Veterans' Affairs Committee Action

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

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