



March 19, 2022

Madam President Liz, all District Auxiliary officers and members,

As the First Session of the 117th Congress closed, you'll want to take a look at the overview of key legislation enacted and ultimately led to our "**Legislative Victories for Veterans in 2021.**"

#### **Disability Compensation**

- S. 189, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2021, was enacted on October 8, 2021, and became Public Law 117-45. It provided an increase of nearly 6% for all disability compensation rates effective December 1, 2021.

#### **Dependents and Survivors**

- S. 1095, the Colonel John M. McHugh Tuition Fairness for Survivors Act of 2021, impacts individuals who are entitled to educational assistance under the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance program. VA must disapprove courses of education provided by public institutions of higher learning if such institutions charge a higher rate for tuition and fees than in-state tuition. S. 1095 was enacted on November 30, 2021 and became Public Law 117-68.

#### **Education & Employment**

- H.R. 2523, the Training in High-demand Roles to Improve Veteran Employment Act or the THRIVE Act, mandates VA to update training and education policies and programs. This impacts VA's rapid retraining assistance program and notes that the list of high-demand occupations must be prepared in conjunction with the Department of Labor. H.R. 2523 was enacted on June 8, 2021 and became Public Law 117-16.
- S. 894, the Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021, requires 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. S. 894 was enacted on November 30, 2021 and became Public Law 117-67.
- H.R. 5545, the Responsible Education Mitigating Options and Technical Extensions Act or REMOTE Act, extends vital protections for student veterans by extending remote learning waivers and ensuring that full housing benefits are given to student veterans as schools continue to conduct virtual classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. H.R. 5545 was enacted on December 21, 2021 and became Public Law 117-76.

#### **Health Care Facilities**

- S. 1910, the Major Medical Facility Authorization Act of 2021, authorized VA to carry out specified major medical facility projects during FY 2021. The bill also indicates the

maximum amount that could be spent on each project. S. 1910 was enacted on July 29, 2021 and became Public Law 117-30.

- H.R. 1510 directs 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. It was enacted on November 23, 2021 and became Public Law 117-64.

#### **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

- H.R. 2441, the Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021, requires VA to establish and maintain three new centers of the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (RANGE) Program in areas with need for additional mental health care for rural veterans. The RANGE Program serves veterans in rural areas who are experiencing mental illness. H.R. 2441 was enacted on June 30, 2021 and became Public Law 117-21.

#### **Minority and Underserved Veterans**

- H.R. 2093, the Veterans and Family Information Act of 2021, requires VA to make all of its fact sheets available in English, Spanish, Tagalog, and each of the 10 most commonly spoken languages and to establish a publicly available website that provides links to all VA fact sheets. H.R. 2093 was enacted on November 22, 2021 and became Public Law 117-62.
- S. 1031 requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study to assess whether there are disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to (1) compensation benefits administered by VA, (2) disability ratings determined by the VA, and (3) the rejection of fully developed claims for VA benefits. S. 1031 was enacted on November 23, 2021 and became Public Law 117-66.

**Women Veterans** • S. 796, the Protecting Moms Who Served Act of 2021, requires VA to implement the maternity care coordination program and 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. S. 796 was enacted on November 30, 2021 and became Public Law 117-69.

#### **Veterans Provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2022**

The National Defense Authorization Act was enacted on December 27, 2021 and became Public Law 117-81. Although this bill is specific to the DOD, there were many provisions specific to veterans and burn pit exposure on active duty, including those noted below:

- Section 551. Troops-to-Teachers Program—Troops to Teachers supports veterans transitioning to careers in education for over 27 years. This section reauthorizes the program until July 1, 2025.
- Section 584. Updates and preservation of memorials to chaplains at Arlington National Cemetery—This section authorizes updates to Chaplain's Hill at Arlington; however, this will come at no cost to the federal government. It requires private funding. 4
- Section 725. Mandatory Training on Health Effects of Burn Pits—DOD shall provide mandatory training to all medical providers on the potential health effects of burn pits.
- Section 740. Study on Incidence of Breast Cancer among Members of the Armed Forces Serving on Active Duty—This section requires an assessment of the current mammography screening policies to include the feasibility of adding all of those who served in areas with open burn pits.
- Section 741. Government Accountability Office (GAO) biennial study on Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) program—The ILER program allows DOD to identify toxic exposures of service members. However, the program currently tracks those who have served within the last 10 years and those currently serving. The GAO

study will assess several key statistics, costs, effectiveness and the feasibility of including past generations of veterans.

- Section 6601. Eligibility of certain individuals who served with special guerrilla units or irregular forces in Laos for interment in national cemeteries—An individual who served honorably with a special guerilla unit or irregular force operating from Laos in support of the U.S. Armed Forces during the period of February 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975, and resided in the United States at the time of death may be eligible for interment in national cemeteries.
- Section 6602. Expansion of scope of VA open burn pit registry to include open burn pits in Egypt and Syria—VA’s Burn Pit and Airborne Hazards registry will now recognize Egypt and Syria as locations that had active burn pits.
- Section 6605. National Global War on Terrorism Memorial—Authorizes the National Global War on Terrorism Memorial to be located on the national mall in Washington DC.

Moving forward into Second Session of the 117th Congress, the American Legion has just published their 2022 Legislative Priorities which Commander Dillard testified and presented before a joint session of the House & Senate Committees on Veteran Affairs on March 8, 2022. Please click the link and show your voice... we need each of you to make these bills come to life.

<https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/ZKv7VTc1lSyCG6MFPR-WcA>

I had the opportunity on March 1<sup>st</sup> to join, via Zoom, the Joint Committee on Veterans Affairs where Andy Marshall, National Commander, DAV, presented his testimony on behalf of all military veterans. The meeting Chaired by Senator Tester (MT) and Rep. Takano (CA). A wide range of needed legislation was discussed including the congressional oversight needed for a better VA system to collect and share data for factual decision making, suicide prevention and the typical 6 mo. window from discharge and military separation, those affected by for toxic burn pit and contaminated water, needed corrections for family care givers benefits & the 86% denied allowances, the LGBQ & the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell problem still existing as well as the 2.3 million military children under the age of 18 who care for a disabled military parent. If you wish to view the Joint Committee session, you can click on this link.

<https://veterans.house.gov/events/hearings/02/23/2022/joint-house-and-senate-vso-legislative-presentation-1>

These Committee members are truly our advocates but the number of supporters are what drives these legislative bills throughout the Senate and the House.

Passing legislation for benefits to our military men, women and their families is an absolute prime focus for all veterans groups, but we, American Legion Auxiliary members, are an extraordinary group that I believe can do even more. Please get involved and support our veteran legislative actions.

Let’s make 2022 a year of legislative change! We’ve got this!

Go to... [www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Bills](http://www.votervoice.net/AmericanLegion/Bills)

Once there, click on the red box at the top “Sign Up for Alerts.” It’s that easy!

Always yours in service,  
Kimberly Stuhler  
ALA D28 Legislative Chair