

# NH STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

## MEETING MINUTES

**Meeting Date: 3 October 2023**

**Location: ECOC**

**OFFICERS and VOTING MEMBERS in attendance (P):**

Paul Lloyd - Chair (P)

Diane Domenicis - Vice Chair (P)

Denise DeBlois – Secretary (Ex)

Armand Soucy - Chaplain (P)

Kelly Dobens – Treasurer (EX)

David Kenney - Chair Emeritus (P)

Margaret LaBrecque – Sage Emeritus (P)

### **Air Force Association**

Kevin Grady (prim) (P) Gavin MacAloon

### **Air Force Sergeants Association**

Richard Dolbec (prim) Martha Gladu (alt) (P)

### **American Legion**

Mike Lopez (prim) (P) Robert Blais (alt) (P) Bill Roy (alt) (P)

### **AUSA Col. Cross Chapter**

Greg d'Arbonne (prim) (P) Ed Harrington (alt)

### **Catholic War Veterans**

Denise DeBlois (prim) Robert Guldner (alt) (P) Armand Soucy (alt) (P)

### **Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association**

Nate Smith (prim)

### **Disabled American Veterans**

Rick Borrazas (prim) (P) Robert Guldner (alt)

### **Korean War Veterans**

Mike Lopez (prim) (P) Conrad Perreault (alt)

### **Marine Corps League**

Shawn Carboni (prim) (P) Greg Gahan (alt) Chris Peirce (alt) (P)

### **Military Officers Association (MOAA)**

Peter Burdett (prim) (P) Laurance Miller (alt) William Luti (alt)

### **Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)**

Tony Fowler (prim)

### **National Guard Association of NH**

Peter Duffy (prim) (P) Roy Hunter (alt) Mike Horne (alt)

### **NH Army Retiree Council**

Frank Musmanno (prim) Mike Rice (alt)

### **NH National Guard Enlisted Association**

Mike Lestage (prim) Mike Rice (alt) **(P)** Jack Howley (alt)

### **NH Veterans Association**

Kelly Dobens (prim) Mike Young (alt) Doug Crooker(alt)

### **Patriot Resilient Leader Institute (Camp Resilience)**

Kurt Webber (prim) Ed Harrington (alt) Steve Veinotte (alt) **(P)**

### **Reserve Officers Association of NH**

David Kenney (prim) **(P)** Mike Horne (alt) BG John Pappas (alt)

### **Rolling Thunder.**

Bruce Garry (prim) Robert Brown (alt) **(P)** Diane Domenicis (alt) **(P)**

### **Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)**

Denis Querrard (prim) **(P)** AJ Corrow (alt) Paul Lloyd (alt) **(P)**

### **Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA-41}**

Ray Goulet (prim) **(P)** Alan Grant (alt) Robert Heichlinger (Alt) **(P)**

### **Legislative Members (Voting):**

Regina Birdsell  
Tim Lang  
Terry Roy  
Linda Massimilla

### **LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS: (non-voting):**

**Governor's Office** – Trevor McAden  
**Senator Jeanne Shaheen** - Chris Scott **(P)**  
**Senator Maggie Hassan** - Justin Troiano **(P)**  
**Congresswoman Annie Kuster** – Molly Smith **(P)**  
**Congressman Chris Pappas** – Gage Wheeler **(P)**

### **COMMITTEE ADVISORS/AGENCIES: (Present)**

Kevin Forrest, Director, VAMC Manchester, NH  
MG David J. Mikolaities - Adjutant General NHNG  
Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General- NHNG  
Shawn Buck, NH State Veterans Cemetery  
Kim McKay, NH Veterans Home  
Brenton Fraser, Director, Bureau of Community Based Military  
John Reed, Martin's Point  
Jim Adams, Veterans Council  
Jorg Dreusicke, VFW

### **GUESTS:**

Miguel Moralez, SBA  
Tom Mannion, State Representative  
Bob McLaughlin, NCDE  
Robert Drew  
Laurence Miller, MOAA  
Janice Warman  
Derek Proulx  
Tom Clough

**OPEN MEETING/CALL TO ORDER:** Paul Lloyd, Chairman, convened meeting.

**Invocation:** Armand Soucy

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Chairman

**Welcome - Remarks of the Chair:** Paul welcomed our guests.

**Secretary's Report:** Meeting has a quorum. With no edits the minutes were placed in the record.

**Message from the Secretary:** None

**Treasurer's Report:** Chairman **Paul** Lloyd reported a balance of \$652.67.

**Comments from Director Emeritus -** none

**Guest Speaker (s):**

**Rep Tom Mannion:** Explained his bill HB 229 (Defend the Guard) asking the Committee to reconsider our position.

**Kathryn Horgan, Vice President of the Dumont Group:** Explained LSR 2024-2699, Electronic Ballot return.

**Robert "Bob" McLaughlin, Executive Director National Collaborative for Digital Equity:** Explained what their project was doing and asked for Veterans help on their Committee.

**SUPPORTING AGENCY REPORTS:**

**Manchester VA Update:** Kevin Forrest gave a brief report.

**DMAVS Update:** Warren Perry gave an update to the happenings at DMAVS.

**NHVH Update: Kim McKay, NH Veterans Home Commandant**

(attached)

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

Armand Soucy, Full-Service Hospital

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Annual Report, motion by Ray Goulet 2<sup>nd</sup> by Mike Lopez to approve. MP.

Martha Gladu, Announced the Women's Memorial going into the NH State Veterans Cemetery

**LEGISLATIVE BRIEFINGS:** Kevin Grady - Legislative Chair

A question was asked to the Committee to reconsider our position on HB 229, no motion to reconsider.

LSR list attached, no language.

**LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS:**

**Trevor McAden (Governor's Office):** None

**Chris Scott (Senator Shaheen):** Briefing attached.

**Justin Troiano (Senator Hassan):** Briefing attached.

**Molly Smith (Rep. Annie Kuster):** Briefing attached.

**Gage Wheeler (Rep. Chris Pappas):** Briefing attached.

**Next meeting date:** Tuesday, November 7, 2023.

**Adjourn Meeting:** A motion was made by Ray Goulet to adjourn, seconded. Unanimous. Motion carries.

Respectfully Submitted,

Paul Lloyd

Secretary





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NH STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
 1191 GOFFSTOWN RD  
 MANCHESTER NH 03102-2314

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**Summary of Accounts**

Type	Name	Account	End Balance
Savings	BUSINESS SAVINGS	XXXXXX4000	\$5.02
Checking	BUSINESS CHECKING	XXXXXX4009	\$652.67

**BUSINESS SAVINGS - XXXXXX4000**

Authorized Signer : Kelly Dobens  
 Designated Signer : David J Kenney

Eff Date	Tran Date	Description	Debits	Credits	Balance
08/01		Beginning Balance			\$5.02
08/31		Ending Balance			\$5.02

**ACCOUNT SUMMARY:**

Beginning balance	\$5.02
0 Deposits and other credits	\$0.00
0 Dividend payments	\$0.00
0 Withdrawals and other debits	\$0.00
Service charges	\$0.00
Ending balance	\$5.02

**DIVIDEND SUMMARY:**

Dividends paid year-to-date for this account	\$0.00
Annual percentage yield earned	0.000%

**FEE SUMMARY:**

Description	This Period	Year-to-Date
Total Overdraft Fees	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Returned Item Fees	\$0.00	\$0.00

**BUSINESS CHECKING - XXXXXX4009**

Authorized Signer : Kelly Dobens  
 Designated Signer : David J Kenney

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Description	This Period	Year-to-Date
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Total Returned Item Fees	\$0.00	\$0.00



October 3, 2023

SVAC notes for NH Veterans Home

- Current census – 135 residents; 124 men and 11 women. Average age is 83 years old.
- Staffing: overall vacancy rate is 38%. Nursing vacancy is 46% which correlates to the 40% resident bed vacancy rate.
- Covid update – we had a large covid outbreak this summer but all is well. All residents effected are healthy and at home with us.
- New LNA class to begin this month with another planned in January 2024.
- Paving project – we will be paving areas around the fishing pond to allow easier access for those veterans in a wheelchair to visit the pond safely.
- New addition – we are moving forward with the building of a new neighborhood to allow for private rooms with private bathrooms. We will not be increasing our bed count but instead providing more privacy for our veterans while putting best infection control practices in place. This will be a project supported by the State of NH and the VA. Anticipated completion of the project is Spring of 2026.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kim MacKay, MS, NHA  
Commandant  
NH Veterans Home

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Manchester Healthcare System

Veterans, it's that time of the year ... get your

# FLU VACCINE

## Manchester VA Medical Center Flu Clinic Dates

Where: 718 Smyth Road, Manchester, NH 03104



- **Drive-thru Clinics** – Open in October  
Wednesdays, 8 a.m. to Noon on 10/4, 10/11, 10/18, and 10/25  
Building 7, Manchester VAMC
- **Walk-in Clinic** – Friday, 10/13 from 8 a.m. to Noon  
Mountain Entrance, Manchester VAMC
- **Walk-in Clinic** – Friday, 10/27 from 8 a.m. to Noon  
Seacoast Entrance, Manchester VAMC
- **Weekend Clinic** – Saturday, 10/21 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Drive-thru, Building 7, Manchester VAMC



## Conway, Portsmouth, Somersworth & Tilton Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs)

- Call (603) 624-4366, and select Option 2 to schedule a visit at whichever clinic you prefer to receive your flu vaccine.



# Support Breast Cancer Awareness Month!

## WEAR PINK ON FRIDAYS

Join the **PINK OUT**. Wear your pink in support of finding a cure for breast cancer. All staff and Veterans are encouraged to wear pink **every Friday in October**.

Participants can wear Jeans and **PINK** every Friday in October to support Breast Cancer Awareness and the importance of screening.

For more information contact Tanya Pinter at 603-624-4366 ext. 2498

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Manchester Healthcare System





# Through Their Eyes

## October is Blindness Awareness Month

### JOIN US!

The 'Through Their Eyes' event is a resource fair of services a blind or visually impaired Veteran might receive. Guests can experience the Blind Rehabilitation System of Care through the eyes of a blind or visually impaired Veteran with the use of simulator glasses and a profile, then navigate the resource fair.

**OCTOBER 12, 2023 | NOON TO 3 P.M.**

**SOLARIUM (BASEMENT LEVEL) - OPEN TO ALL**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
*Manchester Healthcare System*

For more info reach out to the Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Jacqui Dion at (603) 624-4366 ext. 6475.



**Manchester VA Medical Center is a collection site for National Prescription Take Back Day--a free event for communities nationwide to properly dispose of old and unneeded medications safely and anonymously!**

**In April 2023, we collected over 60 lbs of prescription drugs with your help. Drive-thru and drop off!**



**Saturday, Oct. 28**  
**10 a.m. to 2 p.m.**  
**Manchester VA Medical Center**  
**Mountain Entrance**  
**718 Smyth Road**  
**Manchester, NH 03104**

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
Manchester Healthcare System





# CAREGIVER SUPPORT RESOURCE FAIR

## INFO

Date: October 30, 2023

Time: 9 a.m. to Noon

Location: Manchester VA Medical Center

718 Smyth Road, Manchester, NH 03104

Room: Solarium, located in the basement level

- ✓ In-person resource fair
- ✓ Learn about resources available to support Veterans and their Caregivers
- ☎ For more info call (603) 624-4366 ext. 6895

## PARTICIPANTS

Geriatrics and Extended Care, Veteran's Benefits Administration, Suicide Prevention, Intimate Partner Violence, Home-Based Primary Care, Spinal Cord Injury/Disease, Military 2 VA, Traumatic Brain Injury, Pain Clinic, Visual Impairment Service Team, Nutrition, Medical Foster Home Program, Whole Health, Homeless Services, Chaplain Services, NH Veteran Service Officers, Service Link, Alzheimer's Association, Dreams for Marines, and Partnerships for Public Health



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
Manchester Healthcare System

Since the date of the prior SVAC meeting, some of the legislation introduced by Senator Shaheen includes the following:

- **Bring Our Heroes Home Act (Shaheen-Crapo) (S. 2825)**
  - On July 13<sup>th</sup>, Senator Shaheen and Senator Crapo introduced legislation which would eliminate obstacles preventing families and caseworkers from accessing the records needed for recovering America's prisoners of war (POWs) and missing in action (MIA).
- **NDAAs**
  - Senator Shaheen is now involved in conference negotiations with the House of Reps to negotiate a final NDAA bill that will pass both chambers with bipartisan support.

**Cosponsored:**

- **Dustoff Crews of the Vietnam War Congressional Gold Medal Act (Cornyn-Warren) (S. 2825)**
  - On September 14<sup>th</sup>, Senator Shaheen cosponsored Senators Cornyn's and Warren's legislation to collectively award a group of Vietnam War veterans known as "Dustoff Crews" with the Congressional Gold Medal. "Dustoff" was the radio call sign of the helicopter-borne medical evacuation teams that landed in hostile conditions to save wounded Americans and South Vietnamese allies. Between 1962 through 1973, Dustoff crews were responsible for transporting 17,700 United States casualties. During this period, soldiers assigned to Dustoff crews had a one-in-three chance of being wounded or killed.
- **Veteran Families Health Services Act (Murray) (S. 2801)**
  - Senator Shaheen again cosponsored this bill, which would revamp and expand the fertility options for service members and veterans.
- **TAP Promotion Act (King) (S. 2888)**
  - On September 21<sup>st</sup>, Senator Shaheen was an original cosponsor of this legislation that would require that a recognized Veterans Service Organization (VSO) or other experts be present to promote benefits available to veterans in the course of pre-separation counseling under the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).
- **Elizabeth Dole Home Health Act (Moran-Tester-Hassan) (S. 141)**
  - On September 28<sup>th</sup>, Senator Shaheen cosponsored (**Senator Hassan's**) legislation that would expand access to home and community-based care programs for veterans, specifically by increasing the VA expenditure cap on alternative care programs from 65% to 100% for certain groups of veterans, such as those with ALS and spinal cord



SVAC

Senator Jeanne Shaheen

03 OCT 2023

- injuries. This legislation would also implement a pilot program to provide home health services to veterans in communities with a shortage of home health aides.
- **GUARD VA Benefits Act (Boozman) (S. 740)**
    - On September 6<sup>th</sup>, Senator Shaheen cosponsored legislation that would protect Veterans who are filing benefit claims from unauthorized fees and predatory practices. The legislation would also reinstate criminal penalties for unaccredited entities who charge unauthorized fees for helping a Veteran file a disability claim.

#### **Letters:**

- **Letter on FY24 PFAS Conference Priorities (Shaheen)**
  - In September, Senator Shaheen sent a letter to the Chairs and Ranking Members of SASC and SAC-D outlining the PFAS priorities she secured in the Senate-passed NDAA she would like to see preserved in conference.
- **VA Accredited Representatives (Tester)**
  - In September, Senator Shaheen co-signed this letter to Secretary McDonough asking that the agency clarify the VA's Office of General Counsel's (OGC) reading of Title 38 on whether it is legal for private sector entities to charge veterans fees that are four times the monthly increase in benefits.
- **NARA Military Records Backlog (Ossoff-Braun-Rubio-Kaine)**
  - In September, Senator Shaheen signed a letter to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), requesting an update on the funds appropriated to NARA for eliminating the backlog of requests for military records and implementing a system to ensure it does not occur again. The letter asks about the status of the backlog, the types of requests in the backlog, the average wait time for service records and the implementation of new technologies to aid in processing and response times.

#### **Amendments Joined:**

- **Kosovo/PACT Act Amendment (Welch)**
  - Senator Shaheen joined Senator Welch's amendment to the FY24 Milcon-VA bill on the floor that will require the VA to conduct a study on the toxic exposure Kosovo veterans may have been subjected to as a first step in establishing a presumption for PACT Act claims.

#### **Legislation that Passed the Senate:**

- **National Warrior Call Day Resolution (Shaheen-Cotton) (S.Res. 208)**
  - On September 21<sup>st</sup>, Senator Shaheen and Senator Cotton's resolution to designate November 12, 2023, as National Warrior Call Day passed the Senate unanimously.

SVAC

Senator Jeanne Shaheen

03 OCT 2023

This resolution encourages all individuals in the United States, especially members of the Armed Forces serving on active duty and veterans, to call a warrior, have an honest conversation, and connect them with support, understanding that making a warrior call could save a life.

- **National Guard State Partnership Program Resolution (Shaheen-Graham) (S. Res. 308)**
  - On July 25<sup>th</sup>, the Senate unanimously passed Senator Shaheen's resolution with Senator Graham celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program. Thirty-two other Senators joined as cosponsors.

## **New Hampshire State Veterans Advisory Committee**

### **Legislative Update**

#### **Office of U.S. Senator Maggie Hassan**

**10/3/23**

#### **6.28.2023 - Senators Hassan and Hyde-Smith Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Guarantee School Readmission for National Guard and Reserve Students**

U.S. Senators Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), and Representatives Matt Cartwright (D-PA) and Mike Ezell (R-MS) introduced a bill to ensure that students who serve in the National Guard and Reserve will be guaranteed readmission to their schools following a mobilization.

The bicameral, bipartisan Servicemember Enrollment and Readmission for Valuable Education (SERVE) Act would amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to ensure that students called to serve in domestic, short-term National Guard and Reserve mobilizations are able to return to their studies.

Under current law, the readmission requirements for service members only guarantee readmittance to an educational institution if the student is deployed for more than 30 days. Under this standard, National Guard and Reserve members mobilized for fewer than 30 days are not universally entitled to be promptly readmitted.

The SERVE Act would remove the “more than 30 days” stipulation and simply qualify National Guard and Reserve members on active duty orders, active duty training, or National Guard duty under State order or Federal authority. This change would guarantee a student will be readmitted promptly at the same academic status.

*“Students in the Reserves and the National Guard selflessly serve their communities and our country, and they shouldn’t have to jeopardize their spot in school because they were called to serve,”* said Senator Hassan. *“I’m proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation to give student National Guard and Reserve members who are mobilized for shorter missions the security of knowing that their spot in school will be waiting for them afterwards.”*

#### **6.29.2023 - PASSED THE SENATE: Bipartisan Bill Cosponsored by Senator Hassan to Help Military Spouses Get Jobs**

The U.S. Senate unanimously passed the Military Spouse Employment Act, led by Senator James Lankford (R-OK) and cosponsored by Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH), to allow executive agencies to appoint military spouses to remote work positions.

“Behind every brave service member who sacrifices to keep our country safe, there are family members who are also sacrificing a great deal,” said Senator Hassan. “We must support military families and this

bipartisan legislation will give military spouses more job opportunities. I urge the House to pass this bill, and I will continue working across the aisle to support service members and their families.”

#### **7.14.2023 - Sullivan & Hassan Seek to Strengthen “LINC” Between VA and Community Services for Veterans**

U.S. Senators Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) and Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.) have introduced the *Leveraging Integrated Networks in Communities through the VA to Address Social Needs (LINC VA) Act*. This legislation enables the coordination of public and private social service resources with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities, prioritizing connections with already existing, community-specific organizations to better coordinate the work of health care and social service providers, and improve the health and well-being of America’s veterans.

The senators’ bill would enable the VA to leverage local expertise through public-private partnerships that connect veterans with community resources, such as food, housing, child care, job training and transportation—services that invariably impact a person’s health care outcomes. The goal of the legislation is to connect veterans with community providers so that every veteran is made aware of the resources that are available to them in the community, ensuring a seamless transition from immediate needs to long-term recovery and support for systemic issues. The bill also requires the VA to identify which needs are being met in the community and which needs are not being adequately met. This will allow Congress to be more informed in targeting future funding efforts.

The LINC VA Act would:

- Direct the VA to carry out a pilot program establishing community integration network infrastructure to connect veterans with local resources. Among others, these resources include:
  - Nutritional assistance
  - Housing
  - Health care
  - Transportation
  - Job training
  - Child care
  - Disability services
  - Ensure that every veteran has awareness of the resources that are available to them in their community.
  - Require at least one VA facility in each of the 18 Veteran Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) to carry out a system of integrated care, with a specific emphasis on under-resourced, rural communities.
  - Utilize risk assessment and screening tools to collect social determinants of health data to quantify veteran health needs.

- Cultivate data to determine what resources communities have and where their networks are lacking. This data can inform future congressional investment.
- Direct the Comptroller General to evaluate the success of the networks, along with recommendations, in a report to Congress within four years of the pilot program.

### **7.18.2023 - PASSED THE SENATE: Senators Hassan and Boozman's Bipartisan Bill to Prevent Waste, Fraud, and Abuse at the VA**

The U.S. Senate unanimously passed a bipartisan bill led by Senators Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and John Boozman (R-AR) to require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to permanently provide mandatory training to employees on reporting waste, fraud, and abuse. This training would be in coordination with the VA Office of the Inspector General (VA OIG), which serves veterans and the public by conducting meaningful independent oversight of the VA.

Prior to Senators Hassan and Boozman's efforts, the VA had a voluntary 45-minute VA OIG training to employees that teaches the skills to spot the early indicators of fraud and other potential crimes – this training helps to support veterans' care and protect taxpayer dollars at the VA. Following Senators Hassan and Boozman introducing the bill and working with the VA OIG on it, the VA made this training mandatory. The Senators' bill would enshrine this new VA policy in law.

### **8.15.2023 - VA Expands Eligibility for Breast Cancer Screenings as Part of Hassan-Backed Bipartisan Law**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced that it is expanding eligibility for veterans to get breast cancer screenings, which is required under the Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas SERVICE Act. Senator Hassan cosponsored the bipartisan bill, and it was signed into law last year.

VA is expanding eligibility for breast cancer risk assessments and clinically appropriate mammograms as a part of implementing the Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas SERVICE Act. Dr. Hendricks Thomas was a Marine Corps Veteran who deployed to Iraq in 2005, where she was exposed to burn pits. In 2018, she was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer. She tragically passed away April 5, 2022, at the age of 42.

These services are available to Veterans who served in the following places and timeframes:

- Iraq between Aug. 2, 1990, and Feb. 28, 1991, and from March 19, 2003, until VA determines burn pits are no longer used in Iraq.
- The Southwest Asia theater of operations, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar (but not including Iraq), from Aug. 2, 1990, until VA determines burn pits are no longer used in such locations.
- Afghanistan, Djibouti, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Yemen from Sept. 11, 2001, until VA determines burn pits are no longer used in such locations.

Other locations and time periods as determined by the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry.

### **9.21.23 - TO PRESIDENT'S DESK: Senators Hassan and Braun's Bipartisan Bill to Support Veterans' Children Born with Spina Bifida**

A bipartisan bill introduced by Senators Maggie Hassan (D-NH), a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and Mike Braun (R-IN) to strengthen the VA Spina Bifida Program to benefit the children of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange has passed the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill previously passed the Senate unanimously and now heads to President Biden's desk.

Many Vietnam veterans were exposed to the chemical Agent Orange during their service. Children born to those exposed to Agent Orange have a higher risk of spina bifida. Of the estimated 1,500 veterans' kids suffering from spina bifida in the U.S., fewer than half of those are enrolled in the VA Spina Bifida program. Under Senator Hassan and Braun's bill, the VA will proactively reach out to potential beneficiaries to make sure that they are getting the benefits that they are eligible for. Those benefits will also now last for the life of the child and are not affected by the death of their parent.

*"Vietnam veterans made significant sacrifices for our country, and it is up to us to ensure that their children who were born with spina bifida receive the care that they need,"* said Senator Hassan. *"I am glad to see this bipartisan bill head to President Biden's desk so that we can help provide more veterans and their families with the benefits that they have earned and deserve."*

### **9.28.2023 - Rosen Leads Bipartisan Group of Women Senators Urging Administration to Recognize Female Veterans' Combat Service, Open Access to Benefits**

U.S. Senator Jacky Rosen (D-NV) led colleagues in a bipartisan letter to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough urging them to identify and amend military records of approximately 310 women veterans who deployed alongside Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq to ensure they accurately reflect their combat service. She was joined by Senators Joni Ernst (R-IA), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Maggie Hassan (D-NH).

Before female servicemembers were able to formally serve in combat roles, female Cultural Support Teams were deployed to combat zones with Special Operations Forces in order to engage with the female populations, greatly expanding operational and intelligence-gathering capabilities. Many of these women accompanied Special Forces on raids and sustained injuries, but their military records do not reflect their combat service. As a result, they have been denied health care and disability benefits relating to their service-connected injuries.

*"Instead of being treated for physical and mental injuries resulting from their deployments, these women have been turned away by the VA, unable to convince a clinician that their injuries such as post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries, and disabling physical trauma are combat-related,"* wrote the Senators. *"Due to these administrative oversights, we call upon you to remedy these errors so our nation may properly recognize and care for our female combat veterans."*

Congresswoman Kuster Introduces resolution to honor Gold Star Families.

The Gold Star Families Remembrance Week Resolution establishes a national week to honor the sacrifices made by families of U.S. military service members who lost their lives in service to the nation and designates September 24th to 30th, 2023, as Gold Star Families Remembrance Week.

Congresswoman Kuster called on the VA to protect veterans filing benefits claims from predatory action, she was a cosponsor of the Guard VA Benefits Act introduced by Rep. Pappas.

Congresswoman Annie Kuster participated in the NH Summit to End Veteran Homelessness, hosted by Harbor Care Veterans FIRST and New England College. During the Summit, Kuster spoke with veterans and local organizations about steps Congress can take to address veteran suicide, support our service members, and ensure they have the resources they need.

Rep. Kuster voted to pass out of the House the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2023, legislation to improve the VA disability claims process.

Congresswoman Kuster co-sponsored:

HR 5667- Pay Our Military Act

To ensure continuity of pay and allowances for members of the Armed Forces in the event of a lapse in appropriations.

H.R.4424 - Vietnam Veterans Liver Fluke Cancer Study Act

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct an epidemiological study and report on the prevalence of cholangiocarcinoma (bile duct cancer) in veterans who served in the Vietnam theater of operations during the Vietnam era. The study shall identify the rate of incidence of cholangiocarcinoma in such veterans and in U.S. residents.

HR 4335- VA Loan informed Disclosure Act of 2023

To amend the National Housing Act to include information regarding VA home loans in the Informed Consumer Choice Disclosure required to be provided to prospective FHA borrowers.

HR 1529 - Veteran's Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2023

This bill would provide an increase to the COLA for verteran's disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation beneficiaries by the same amount as increases for the Social Security COLA.

## Rep. Pappas DC Actions for Veterans – July-September 2023

### Sponsored Legislation

- **Veterans Benefits Improvement Act**
  - **Update:** Rep. Pappas helped introduce this bill, which passed the House on September 20.
  - This bipartisan legislation would improve VA benefits accessibility by requiring that the Secretary publish disability benefit questionnaire (DBQ) forms on the VA's website for use by a veteran's private provider. It also includes a report on improving access to travel reimbursement pay for veterans living abroad who must attend a disability exam. Additionally, this bill would improve communication regarding the scheduling of disability exams between contractors, veterans, and the veteran's accredited representative.
- **Remembering Our Local Heroes Act**
  - **Update:** Rep. Pappas helped introduce this bipartisan bill on August 29
  - This bill would create a federal grant program to help communities with the construction, maintenance, and restoration of memorials that recognize the service of veterans, active-duty military personnel, law enforcement, and firefighters.
- **Preserving Access to Patient Reimbursement Act**
  - **Update:** Rep. Pappas helped introduce this bipartisan bill on September 27.
  - Recent changes to the VA Travel Reimbursement program will require all travel reimbursement forms to be submitted online beginning in fiscal year 2024. Under the previous policy, online submissions were encouraged, but paper forms were available for veterans who did not have access to a computer or internet connectivity, or did not have the capability to navigate the online portal.
  - Many veterans in the most rural parts of New Hampshire lack access to broadband, and must travel long distances to access VA care. These veterans rely upon the travel reimbursement program to be able to afford that commute to their doctor appointments, and this new legislation would ensure they can still access travel reimbursements through the use of paper forms that would continue to be made available at VA health centers.
- **VA Medical Security Report Act**
  - **Update:** Rep. Pappas helped introduce this bipartisan bill in May, which passed out of the House Veterans Affairs Committee in July.
  - The VA Medical Security Report Act of 2023 aims to increase safety and security at VA Medical facilities by requiring VA leadership to provide reports that accurately detail the health of VA police forces and security at VA Medical Centers. These reports – which will be shared with Congress over the next five years – will detail staffing vacancies, security weakness, and data on criminal activities, training, vacancies, and security weaknesses. Additionally, the bill requires that these reports include input from police leaders on the ground.

### Cosponsored Bills

- **Pay Out Troops Act:** would ensure members of the armed services (Incl. Coast Guard, Defense & contractors) are paid in the event of a government shutdown. At present, only essential personnel will receive backpay.



- **Love Lives on Act of 2023:** would allow the spouses of deceased servicemen to retain their benefits even if they remarry.
- **Correcting Guam's History in the PACT Act:** would expand PACT Act toxic exposure presumption to individuals who served in Guam or in Guam's territorial waters from 1958 to 1980.
- **TRICARE Fairness for National Guard and Reserve Retirees Act:** would allow retired reserve personnel under age 60 who are receiving retirement pay to access the lower cost TRICARE health coverage specifically designed for military personnel.
- **Veterans Infertility Treatment Act:** expands infertility care provided by the VA for servicemembers and their families.
- **Retired Pay Restoration Act:** would allow veterans to receive both military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation in response to any service-connected disability.
- **Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act:** would expand the evidentiary standard for survivors of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) to ensure that they are getting the benefits that they are due.
- **Respect for Grieving Military Families Act:** would revise current DOD policy that retains the final month of late servicemembers' retirement pay and allow family members to maintain financial security by giving them the opportunity to repay overpayment of benefits over a 12-month period.
- **VET CARE Act of 2023:** would require the VA to establish a four-year pilot program providing dental care for Veterans with certain chronic health conditions. VA would enroll at least 1,500 eligible veterans with Type II Diabetes at five VA facilities across the country for outpatient dental treatment, at no cost to them.
- **Equal Access to Contraception for Veterans Act:** would provide female veterans with access to no-cost contraceptive care by removing the co-pays that they usually have to pay for contraceptive services.
- **Fleet Reserve Association 100th Anniversary Act:** directs the Department of the Treasury to mint \$5 gold coins, \$1 silver coins, and half-dollar coins to commemorate the centennial of the foundation and charter of the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) in 1924. The sale of any coins shall include a surcharge, which would support the FRA's activities.
- **Veterans National Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment Act:** would establish a Hyperbaric Oxygen Treatment (HBOT) pilot program at the VA to treat veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).
- **ACES Act:** would provide the resources for a study conducted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine detailing the history of cancer among former members of aircrew in the Armed Forces.
- **VA Emergency Transportation Access Act:** would bar the VA from reducing rates of pay and reimbursement for special mode transportation providers, including ground and air ambulances, unless VA can ensure affordability for veterans.
- **Hello Girls Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2023:** would award a Congressional Gold Medal in honor of female telephone operators of Army Signal Corps, in recognition of struggle for Veterans' Benefits and recognition as soldiers.
- **VA Loan Informed Disclosure Act of 2023:** would add VA Home Loans to the Housing and Urban Development "Informed Consumer Choice Disclosure Notice," ensuring that VA home loans are listed in a comparative fashion with other types of home loans.

- **Not Just a Number Act:** would require the VA to assess the relationship between VA benefits and veteran suicide by including veterans' benefit usage in their annual suicide prevention report.

### **Co-Signed Letters**

- Letter to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs requesting a delay to the effective date of the rule reducing ambulance reimbursement to outdated CMS schedule until Congress can develop/pass authorizing language for VA to negotiate contracts for 911 calls.
- Letter to the VA asking about their enforcement of existing protections for veterans seeking assistance with benefits and protecting them from "quasi-legal" claim sharks.
- Letter to DOD to encourage the acceleration of environmental cleanups and to reduce the agency's existing backlog of contaminated sites needing cleanup.