

Coalition of Veterans Organizations

CVO

*Leave No
Veteran Behind*

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT

PREPARED BY
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OCTOBER 2024

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1. In reporting legislation that has been introduced, the same bills and writeups from the previous month will be repeated, with new bills or changes in **boldface**.

2. S. 10: VA Careers Act of 2023: Legislation to bolster efforts to recruit and retain strong clinical and managerial leadership in the VA health care system and make other important improvements to attract clinicians in scarce medical specialties. It has 10 co-sponsors, none from IL.

3. S. 42: Build for Veterans Act of 2023: This infrastructure bill has 11 co-sponsors, none from IL.

4. S.141: Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act: It expands the program for home care. It has **31** co-sponsors, none from IL. H. R. 542 (House version) has 76 co-sponsors, 4 from IL (Underwood, Budzinski, Schakowsky, Ramirez). It passed in the House and is going to the Senate.

5. Cong Julia Brownley introduced H. R. 2413: Dental Care for Veterans Act, the same as H. R. 96 and H.R. 914. It has **68** co-sponsors, 12 from IL (Garcia, Quigley, Schakowsky, Underwood, Krishnamoorthi, Casten, Jackson, Kelly, Davis, Ramirez, Foster, Budzinski). Ramirez and Budzinski are on the Veterans Affairs Cmte., and Budzinski is on the Healthcare Subcommittee.

I can email you the letters that I send (one for those who previously co-sponsored and one for those who have not) so you can use it, or if you give me the email address of a congressman's DC staffer who handles veterans issues, I can email it, but if they don't co-sponsor, you can call them 2 weeks later.

Most of the national organizations have not been doing their part. At least the DAV put out a legislative alert, so that anyone can input his name/address and have letters generated to his congressman/senators. That has resulted in more co-sponsors from other states. Please disseminate their letter to others who may not have received it. Please contact the other national groups.

S. 4357: Comprehensive Dental Reform Act of 2024. Sens. Bernie Sanders and Sherrod Brown introduced this bill that would, among a great many things, require the VA to treat dental care like the other medical specialties. Veterans are only one of several groups that would get dental care under this Act. The way congress.gov lists sponsors/co-sponsors, Brown is listed as a co-sponsor. There are no others.

6. H. R. 2410: VET CARE Act of 2023: It establishes a pilot program for dental care, but it's only for those with diabetes who are 40-70 years old. It has **19** co-sponsors, none from IL. We are not supporting this bill.

7. H. R. 1767: Student Veteran Benefit Restoration Act would restore GI Bill education benefits to defrauded student veterans. It was introduced by Cong. Delia Ramirez (IL) and has 23 co-sponsors, 5 from IL (Schakowsky, Budzinski, Garcia, Krishnamoorthi, Bost). It passed in the House. We are waiting for a senator to take up the bill in the senate.

8. S. 1954: Improving Whole Health for Veterans with Chronic Conditions Act. This bill was introduced by Sen. Bernie Sanders, whereby veterans would have to get heart or kidney disease in order to get dental

care. It has 14 co-sponsors, 1 from IL (Durbin). H. R. 4150 is the house version. It has 4 co-sponsors (none from IL). We are not supporting these bills, because veterans should not have to contract health problems in order to get treatment for another.

9. S. 106: Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act. It would give \$ to states for VA outreach. It has 14 co-sponsors, none from IL. H. R. 984, (House version) has 65 co-sponsors, 2 from IL (Underwood and Foster).

10. S. 1975: Discharge Review Board Accountability Act of 2023. It would require the GAO to conduct a study on the compliance of discharge review boards with statutory provisions and directives related to liberal consideration of certain conditions and for other purposes. This bi-partisan bill has 5 co-sponsors, none from IL.

11. S. 3452: Fred Hamilton Veterans Lost Records Act. The records of many veterans were lost in the fire at the National Records Center. It would allow veterans to use additional methods to apply for benefits when the government loses or damages their records. It has 7 co-sponsors, none from IL. H. R. 8048 (House version) has 3 co-sponsors, none from IL.

12. S. 3560: Combat Veterans Pre-Enrollment Act of 2024: It has 9 co-sponsors, 1 from IL (Durbin).

13. H. R. 6656: Stuck on Hold Act: It would reduce wait times for vets making phone calls to the Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA). The bill would require the VA's telephone call line to include an automated response system that would do two things: 1) advise the caller of the anticipated wait time and 2) offer the caller the ability to receive a callback if the wait time is excessive. There are 3 co-sponsors, none from IL.

14. H. R. 8560: End Veteran Homelessness Act of 2024. It will not outlaw veteran homelessness, but will make certain improvements to the supported housing program for veterans commonly known as "HUD-VASH." It has **13** co-sponsors, 2 from IL (Ramirez and Budzinski, both on the Veterans Affairs Cmte.)

15. Veterans and Family Advisory Council (JBVAMC monthly meetings): I spam out the "tracker," where action items are listed, along with their status.

I continue to bring up the need for making the JBVAMC Pharmacy more efficient for in-person pickups, but it never seems to get on the "Tracker" list. At the Oct. 11 meeting, I asked to have a guest speaker from the Pharmacy at a forthcoming meeting. Having guest speakers is something that is done for these meetings.

There was a guest speaker from Scheduling. One complaint was that when we are emailed our list of upcoming appts., they do not include the clinic that the appointment is for. Another concern is that the letters we are sent are often received after the appt. has taken place. I mentioned a problem that I just had, with a Lakeside appt. where I made the comment that these mailings are about as slow as when someone tells you that he is sending you a check.

I complained that for CBOC appts., that instead of us calling the desk at the CBOC, we must call the regular scheduling number. The speaker said that if we were to call the CBOC desks, that they would be too busy. I replied that the schedulers don't know the grouping we are in, and that the scheduler tried to schedule me for a Wednesday appt., not knowing that I am in the Tuesday group.

16. VACCC: The next meeting will be Tuesday, Dec. 17, at 1900, on the far SW side.

At the Sept. 24 meeting, I asked for the number of organizations that had applied for the State Charter and the number that were successful. Nobody knew, but they would find out. Shortly after, we learned that the Atty. General's Veterans Rights Bureau would not release the info. I then filed a FOIA request, and they replied that only 2 groups (of which we were one) applied, and none were successful. This shows that the requirements were so onerous, that only 2 applied, and these were unsuccessful.