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January 17, 2014

The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Chairman
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of DAV (Disabled American Veterans), an organization of 1.2 million wartime veterans who were wounded, injured or became ill due to military service, I write to offer our sincere thanks for your leadership in crafting and introducing S. 1950, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014.

Your bill, if enacted, would accomplish many of DAV's most important priorities and legislative goals based on national resolutions approved by our members.

This massive omnibus bill, unprecedented in our modern experience, would create, expand, advance, and extend a number of VA benefits, services and programs that are important to DAV and to our members. For example, responding to a call from DAV as a leading veterans organization, it would create a comprehensive family caregiver support program for all generations of severely wounded, injured and ill veterans. Also, the bill would authorize advance appropriations for VA's mandatory accounts to ensure that in any government shutdown environment in the future, veterans benefits payments would not be delayed or put in jeopardy. This measure also would provide additional financial support to survivors of service members who die in the line of duty, as well as expanded access for them to GI Bill educational benefits. A two-plus year stalemate in VA's authority to lease facilities for health care treatment and other purposes would be solved by this bill. These are but a few of the myriad provisions of this bill that would improve the lives and health of veterans—especially the wounded, injured and ill—and their loved ones.

These and many other provisions in your bill are directly responsive to DAV's legislative and policy priorities, and we are deeply grateful for your leadership in bringing them to the fore through this legislation. We will continue to work with you and other Senators to use the experience of Public Law 111-81, the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009, to inform Congress of the proven benefit of advance appropriations in all VA discretionary appropriations accounts.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, DAV appreciates and strongly supports passage of S. 1950, and we will work with you and other Senators to enact this bill into law at the earliest possible date. Thank you for your leadership in advancing and protecting the interests of veterans wounded, injured and ill due to their service in our armed forces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JOHNSTON', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JOSEPH W. JOHNSTON
National Commander

JWJ:lmb

c: Senate Majority Leader Reid
Senate Minority Leader McConnell
Ranking Member, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Burr
DAV Department Commanders and Adjutants