



## **Written Statement before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee**

Regarding Pending Legislation

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Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and distinguished members of the Committee:

On behalf of AMVETS, we thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding several pieces of pending legislation before the Committee. Founded in 1944, AMVETS is one of the nation's most inclusive Congressionally chartered veterans service organizations, representing the interests of veterans of all eras, as well as their families, caregivers, and survivors.

We appreciate the Committee's continued commitment to advancing thoughtful, bipartisan legislation that strengthens the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), improves access to timely, high-quality care, and ensures that veterans and their families receive the benefits they have earned through service and sacrifice.

The proposals under consideration reflect a broad effort to address persistent gaps in access to care, modernize benefits delivery, support caregivers and survivors, and strengthen oversight across the VA system. They also recognize the evolving needs of today's veteran population, including women veterans, those experiencing homelessness, and individuals living with complex and chronic conditions such as ALS, TBI, and spinal cord injuries.

AMVETS is proud to support many of the bills before the Committee, particularly those that align with our national priorities. These include efforts to coordinate a national veterans strategy, strengthen survivor benefits, expand neurorehabilitative and whole health services, support women veterans, and improve economic opportunity. We also offer targeted recommendations on several proposals to ensure they are implemented in a way that protects access, preserves flexibility, and delivers meaningful results for veterans.

### **I. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS SUPPORTED BY AMVETS**

#### **A. PURSUING A COORDINATED NATIONAL VETERANS STRATEGY**

For years, AMVETS has called for a unified national approach that better aligns the work being done across federal, state, and community systems. We look forward to working with Congress,

the administration, and partners nationwide to help ensure every veteran has a clear pathway to success.

### **S. 3726, the National Veterans Strategy Act**

AMVETS strongly supports the National Veterans Strategy Act of 2026, which would establish a government-wide framework for defining and advancing veteran success. Current efforts remain too often disconnected, without a consistent way to measure outcomes or coordinate resources.

Establishing shared metrics and a national strategy will help align efforts across sectors and improve accountability. This approach reflects the reality that long-term success depends on coordination across health care, economic opportunity, education, and community engagement. We are thankful to Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Blumenthal for introducing this bill and recognizing the need for a coordinated approach.

## **B. STRENGTHENING SURVIVOR BENEFITS AND HONORING SERVICE**

AMVETS remains committed to ensuring that surviving families are treated fairly and that veterans are honored with dignity. Several of these proposals address longstanding gaps in survivor support and memorial recognition.

### **S. 749, Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2025**

AMVETS has been a longtime supporter of the Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2025, which addresses a clear inequity in survivor benefits for families of veterans who die from ALS. Although ALS is recognized by the VA as a presumptive service-connected condition, current law governing Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) does not account for the rapid progression of the disease.

Because ALS typically advances quickly, surviving spouses are often unable to meet statutory requirements tied to how long the veteran was rated totally disabled before death. As a result, families are denied enhanced compensation through no fault of their own. This legislation corrects that disparity by ensuring that veterans who die from ALS are treated as meeting the relevant requirements regardless of how long they lived with the disease. AMVETS supports this bill for bringing greater fairness to surviving families facing one of the most devastating service-connected conditions.

### **Draft bill, to increase burial and funeral expenses paid by the Secretary of Veterans**

AMVETS endorses legislation to increase burial and funeral benefits for veterans who die from service-connected conditions. Current benefit levels have not kept pace with the rising cost of funeral and burial services, creating an added burden for families at a time of grief.

By increasing these benefits and tying future adjustments to inflation, this proposal would help ensure that support remains meaningful over time. AMVETS supports this legislation to appropriately honor our veterans' service and sacrifice. Families should not be left carrying

avoidable financial hardship because statutory benefit levels have failed to keep up with current realities.

### **S. 1127, the Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act**

AMVETS also supports the Dennis and Lois Krisfalusy Act, which would remove an outdated eligibility restriction for VA-furnished memorial headstones and markers. Under current law, certain otherwise eligible veterans are excluded solely because they died before November 11, 1998.

That distinction is arbitrary and does not reflect the nature or value of a veteran's service. By eliminating this restriction, this bill ensures that all eligible veterans are afforded equal recognition. A government-furnished headstone or marker is a lasting expression of gratitude, and no veteran should be denied that recognition based solely on an outdated date limitation in statute.

### **C. EXPANDING NEUROREHABILITATIVE AND WHOLE HEALTH CARE**

Improving long-term outcomes requires expanding access to rehabilitative care, innovative treatment models, and whole health approaches that address both physical and mental well-being. AMVETS believes that such policies improve veterans' quality of life, addressing many root causes that lead to negative mental health outcomes and tragic outcomes.

We thank the Committee for their efforts to consider a broader continuum of wellness through these proposals.

### **Draft bill, the Veteran Acquired Brain Injury Caregiving Act**

AMVETS strongly supports the Veteran Acquired Brain Injury Caregiving Act, which would establish a pilot program to expand access to care for veterans living with acquired brain injuries through the Veteran-Directed Care program. Veterans with acquired brain injuries often experience complex cognitive, behavioral, and physical challenges that require individualized, long-term support, yet existing care models do not always provide the flexibility needed to respond effectively.

This legislation would allow eligible veteran-serving nonprofit organizations to use Veteran-Directed Care resources to deliver more tailored services in a community-based setting. AMVETS supports this proposal because it creates a more adaptable model of care for veterans whose needs may not fit neatly within existing systems, while also better supporting the families and caregivers who help sustain recovery and daily functioning.

We are also proud supporters of the Veterans TBI Adaptive Care Opportunities Nationwide Act of 2025 (S. 3130), which would further expand neurorehabilitative care for veterans with TBI. This group of veterans has been left behind for far too long, and we look forward to seeing meaningful legislation passed to finally get them the care they deserve.

### **S. 3988, the Veterans Spinal Trauma Access to New Devices (STAND) Act**

AMVETS endorses the Veterans STAND Act, which would expand access to preventative evaluations and assistive technologies for veterans living with spinal cord injuries and disorders. Veterans with these conditions often face lifelong health challenges that require proactive management, specialized care, and access to tools that preserve mobility and independence.

This legislation advances a more comprehensive approach by emphasizing annual evaluations and improved access to emerging technologies that can improve function and quality of life. Modernizing care for veterans with spinal cord injuries means not only treating complications after they arise, but also making available the kinds of interventions and devices that help prevent deterioration and support long-term independence.

### **Draft bill, the Veterans Outdoor Rehabilitation Act**

AMVETS supports the Veterans Outdoor Rehabilitation Act, which would establish a grant program to expand access to structured outdoor recreation opportunities for veterans. Programs that promote physical activity, peer engagement, and connection with nature can play an important role in supporting both physical and mental well-being, particularly for veterans coping with stress, isolation, or service-related conditions.

By helping states and community partners develop and expand these programs, this bill broadens the range of wellness and rehabilitation options available to veterans. AMVETS fully believes that recovery and resilience are not limited to traditional clinical settings. Structured outdoor programs can complement existing care by improving engagement, strengthening social connections, and supporting long-term wellness.

### **S. 3647, the Disabled Veterans Dignity Act of 2026**

AMVETS is grateful to the Committee for its efforts on the Disabled Veterans Dignity Act of 2026, which would establish a comprehensive program within the VA to address the bowel and bladder care needs of veterans living with spinal cord injuries and disorders. These services are essential to maintaining health, dignity, and independence, yet many veterans continue to face inconsistent access to the level of support they need to remain safely in their homes and communities.

This legislation recognizes that bowel and bladder care is not incidental, but a critical component of daily medical support for severely disabled veterans. It also addresses a fundamental quality-of-life issue that too often goes overlooked and helps ensure that veterans with significant disabilities can live with greater stability, dignity, and independence.

### **S. 3706, the Produce Prescriptions for Veterans Act**

AMVETS supports the Produce Prescriptions for Veterans Act, which would authorize the VA to provide produce prescriptions as part of its medical services. Nutrition plays a significant role in

preventing and managing chronic conditions, yet many veterans face food insecurity while also dealing with illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.

By allowing eligible veterans to receive vouchers or similar support for fruits and vegetables, this legislation offers a practical way to improve health outcomes and address underlying contributors to chronic disease. AMVETS supports this bill for reflecting a broader shift toward preventive and whole-health care, giving veterans and providers another tool to manage their long-term health more effectively.

## **D. ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS AND VULNERABLE VETERANS**

Veterans experiencing homelessness often face complex challenges that require sustained and coordinated care. Our team works daily through the AMVETS Family Service Center in South Strabane, Pennsylvania, and two newly awarded Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program DOL grants to address the needs of these veterans, particularly those facing serious mental health conditions and other complex barriers to care. These veterans need both hands-on action and legislative support to rebuild their lives.

### **S. 4043, the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Act**

The Health Care for Homeless Veterans Act would make permanent the VA's authority to provide treatment and rehabilitation services for veterans who are both seriously mentally ill and experiencing homelessness. These programs are a critical component of the VA's continuum of care and serve some of the most vulnerable members of the veteran community.

Temporary or time-limited authorities create uncertainty for both the providers administering these services and the veterans who rely on them. Making this authority permanent helps ensure continuity of care and reinforces the VA's capacity to provide long-term support where it is most needed. AMVETS recognizes that sustained treatment and rehabilitation services are essential to improving stability, supporting recovery, and helping prevent repeated cycles of homelessness.

## **E. ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND TRANSITION SUPPORT**

Successful transition to civilian life depends in large part on whether veterans can access information, benefits, education, and employment opportunities in a timely and practical way. AMVETS fully endorses policies that reduce avoidable barriers and strengthen pathways to long-term stability and success after service.

### **S. 3591, the Thomas M. Conway Veterans Access to Resources in the Workplace Act**

AMVETS supports the Thomas M. Conway Veterans Access to Resources in the Workplace Act, which would improve awareness of federal and state benefits available to veterans by requiring the development and display of standardized notices in the workplace. Too often, veterans remain unaware of the full range of services and support available to them, particularly as they transition into civilian employment.

By requiring that this information be made more visible and accessible, this bill helps bridge a persistent awareness gap. Access to benefits often begins with access to information. Ensuring that veterans and their families can more easily learn about available resources is a practical but meaningful step toward helping them navigate civilian life more successfully.

### **S. 3993, the Reducing Arbitrary Barriers to Apprenticeship Act**

AMVETS also supports the Reducing Arbitrary Barriers to Apprenticeship Act of 2026, addressing longstanding disparities in how veterans' educational benefits are applied to apprenticeship and on-the-job training programs. These pathways offer meaningful opportunities for veterans to enter skilled professions, yet current benefit structures often place them at a disadvantage compared to those pursuing more traditional academic routes.

This legislation improves equity by removing barriers that limit how veterans can use their earned educational assistance in apprenticeship settings. AMVETS knows that success after service takes many forms, and veterans should be able to pursue the pathway that best fits their goals without being penalized by outdated or uneven benefit rules.

## **F. ADVANCING CARE FOR WOMEN VETERANS**

As the population of women veterans continues to grow, our members strongly support policies that improve access to comprehensive, gender-specific care and address long-standing gaps in service delivery. Ensuring timely access to preventive care, specialty care, and maternity care is essential to improving outcomes and strengthening trust in the VA health system. AMVETS will continue working with Congress and VA leadership to advance policies that ensure equitable, comprehensive care for women who have served.

### **S. 3999, the Women Veterans Specialty Care Access Act**

AMVETS strongly supports the Women Veterans Specialty Care Access Act, which would improve access to gender-specific health services by allowing women veterans to directly schedule appointments for women's specialty care without requiring a referral. Referral requirements can create unnecessary administrative delays and make it harder for women veterans to obtain timely care.

This legislation removes those barriers and promotes more direct access to services such as gynecology, maternity care, and postpartum care. Timely access to women's health services is a critical component of comprehensive, veteran-centered care and should not be hindered by avoidable administrative obstacles.

### **S. 3395, the Mammography Access for Veterans Act of 2025**

Additionally, AMVETS supports the Mammography Access for Veterans Act of 2025, which would expand and strengthen access to breast cancer screening services across the VA. Early detection remains one of the most effective tools in reducing breast cancer mortality, yet many veterans continue to face barriers to timely screening.

By expanding breast imaging access through telescreening, mobile services, and broader availability across states and territories, this bill helps ensure more veterans can receive timely preventive care. Expanding access to life-saving screening services is both necessary and overdue.

### **Draft bill, the Maternal Health for Veterans Act**

AMVETS endorses the Maternal Health for Veterans Act of 2026, which would strengthen oversight, coordination, and investment in maternity care services provided through the VA. As more women veterans rely on these services, improving care coordination and identifying gaps in outcomes becomes increasingly important.

Requiring better reporting and supporting maternity care coordination programs will help improve transparency and strengthen the VA's ability to address disparities in maternal health outcomes. AMVETS maintains that improving maternity care is essential to ensuring that women veterans receive equitable, high-quality support throughout pregnancy and postpartum care.

## **G. IMPROVING ACCESS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND VA SYSTEM PERFORMANCE**

Improving how the VA delivers care and services is essential to strengthening trust and ensuring better outcomes. AMVETS stands behind efforts to boost performance and improve the way the VA delivers care and services, communicates with veterans, and maintains accountability across the system.

### **S. 3170, Stuck On Hold Act**

AMVETS endorses the Stuck On Hold Act, which would require the VA to implement an automated callback system across its customer service telephone lines. For many veterans, access to benefits and services depends on being able to reach the VA by phone, yet long wait times continue to create unnecessary frustration and barriers.

This legislation would help modernize that process and make communication with the VA more responsive and user-centered. Improving access is not only about expanding services, but also about ensuring veterans can reach the system in a timely and practical manner.

### **S. 3311, the Veterans Affairs Peer Review Neutrality Act of 2025**

AMVETS supports the Veterans Affairs Peer Review Neutrality Act of 2025, which would strengthen the integrity of peer review processes within the Veterans Health Administration. Veterans deserve confidence that concerns about care are reviewed fairly, objectively, and without conflicts of interest.

By requiring recusal in cases involving direct participation in care and by promoting neutral review in certain circumstances, the bill reinforces transparency and accountability in quality

management. AMVETS has long advocated for internal oversight to maintain trust in the VA health care system and improve patient outcomes.

### **S. 3992, the Joint Medical Facilities Fund Act**

AMVETS also supports the Joint Medical Facilities Fund Act, which would codify and strengthen the authority for a joint funding mechanism between the Department of Defense and the VA to support shared medical facilities. As the needs of servicemembers and veterans increasingly overlap, strong coordination between these systems becomes more important.

This legislation supports a more structured and efficient approach to maintaining shared infrastructure and delivering integrated care. AMVETS supports the bill because improving coordination between the DOD and the VA is essential to continuity of care and to ensuring that both servicemembers and veterans are served effectively as they move between systems.

## **II. LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS SUPPORTED WITH RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **S. 3000, the FRAUD in VA Disability Exams Act of 2025**

AMVETS appreciates the intent of the FRAUD in VA Disability Exams Act, provided it is implemented in a way that protects veterans from unintended harm. Addressing fraud within the disability claims process is important, but those efforts must be carefully structured to avoid negatively impacting veterans acting in good faith.

AMVETS remains concerned that, without appropriate safeguards, veterans could be unfairly disadvantaged for relying on private medical providers or for minor errors outside of their control. Measures aimed at strengthening oversight should not create additional obstacles for veterans navigating the claims process.

To ensure balance, AMVETS recommends clarifying that privately completed Disability Benefits Questionnaires (DBQs) should not be treated as inherently suspect, establishing a process that allows veterans to correct minor deficiencies before adverse action is taken, and focusing enforcement efforts on patterns of systemic abuse rather than isolated cases. With these protections in place, this legislation can strengthen program integrity without undermining access to earned benefits.

### **S. 3098, the Presumptive CLARITY Act of 2025**

AMVETS also supports the intent of the Presumptive CLARITY Act of 2025, particularly its focus on increasing transparency in how the VA evaluates conditions and cohorts for presumptive service connection related to toxic exposure. Improving visibility into this process can help build trust and provide veterans with a clearer understanding of how these important determinations are made.

At the same time, AMVETS is mindful that new transparency requirements should not create additional administrative burdens that could slow decision-making or divert resources away from

processing claims. Veterans exposed to toxic substances already face significant delays in receiving recognition and care, and added reporting requirements must not further complicate or extend that process.

We recommend that the implementation of this legislation prioritize efficiency and integration with existing VA processes, ensuring that any new requirements are streamlined and do not detract from timely adjudication of claims. With these considerations, this bill can improve transparency while preserving the VA's ability to deliver decisions in a timely and effective manner.

### **S. 3286, Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act 2.0**

AMVETS recognizes the continued need to refine and strengthen the VA appeals process and appreciates the effort to build on prior modernization reforms through the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act 2.0. While earlier changes were intended to improve timeliness and flexibility, implementation has revealed ongoing challenges that warrant thoughtful reassessment.

As Congress considers further adjustments, we remain concerned that certain procedural elements, particularly rigid evidentiary timelines and docket structures, may continue to create barriers for veterans attempting to navigate the system. These issues can be especially difficult for those without representation or those managing serious health conditions while pursuing their claims. Reforms aimed at improving efficiency should not inadvertently limit a veteran's ability to fully develop and present their case.

AMVETS views this legislation as part of a broader, ongoing effort to improve the appeals system and encourages continued dialogue with stakeholders to ensure that future changes enhance both accessibility and fairness. With careful consideration and collaboration, modernization efforts can move forward in a way that strengthens the system while preserving the rights and interests of veterans.

### **S. 3653, the Veterans' Bill of Rights Act of 2026**

Our members recognize the importance of ensuring that veterans are fully informed of their rights when accessing care, benefits, and services through the VA. Clear and accessible information is essential to helping veterans navigate the system and understand the resources available to them.

At the same time, AMVETS encourages careful consideration of how these requirements would be implemented to ensure they are consistent with existing authorities and do not create unnecessary duplication or administrative burden. Efforts to expand awareness should complement, rather than complicate, current processes and communication tools already in place within the VA.

AMVETS looks forward to continuing to work with the Committee to ensure that any efforts in this area improve clarity and access for veterans while maintaining efficiency and consistency across the system.

### **Draft bill, the VHA Novel Therapeutics Preparedness Act**

AMVETS has been at the forefront of advocating for the responsible evaluation and integration of emerging therapeutic interventions for veterans with complex mental health conditions. As innovative approaches continue to develop, particularly in areas such as post-traumatic stress, depression, and TBI, ensuring that the VA is positioned to respond in a coordinated and clinically appropriate manner is essential.

AMVETS supports the goal of improving readiness and establishing a more structured approach to evaluating and implementing novel therapies, including the emphasis on interdisciplinary care, patient safety, and post-treatment integration. These elements reflect the evolving understanding that effective treatment for many veterans requires more comprehensive and supportive care models than traditional approaches alone.

At the same time, AMVETS encourages careful attention to how these efforts are implemented to ensure they remain evidence-driven, scalable, and accessible across the VA system. In particular, coordination with community-based providers, incorporation of peer support, and alignment with existing mental health and suicide prevention programs will be critical to long-term success.

AMVETS looks forward to continued engagement with the Committee and stakeholders to ensure that emerging therapeutic approaches are integrated in a way that expands access, maintains high clinical standards, and supports the full continuum of care for veterans.

### **Draft bill, the Optimizing the VA Workforce for Veterans Act**

A capable and stable workforce is essential to the VA's ability to deliver care and benefits effectively. AMVETS recognizes the importance of long-term planning to ensure staffing levels are aligned with the needs of veterans and that the department is equipped to meet growing and evolving demand.

Efforts to improve workforce planning and transparency, including the development of a strategic human capital plan and clearer communication around staffing changes, can help strengthen the system if implemented thoughtfully. Aligning staffing decisions with actual workload and veteran outcomes is critical to maintaining both access and quality of care.

AMVETS also emphasizes that workforce decisions must remain grounded in mission needs and should not be influenced by shifting political priorities. Actions that affect staffing, particularly reductions in force, have direct consequences for veterans and must be approached with care and deliberation.

As this legislation moves forward, AMVETS encourages an approach that prioritizes continuity, supports frontline staff, and maintains focus on delivering consistent, high-quality services to veterans.

### **Draft bill, a bill to improve the Department of Veterans Affairs schedule for rating disabilities**

AMVETS believes that the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities must remain current, accurate, and reflective of how service-connected conditions impact veterans in their daily lives. The rating schedule plays a central role in determining compensation and must be carefully maintained to ensure fairness and consistency across the system.

However, changes to the rating schedule involve complex medical, legal, and policy considerations that can have wide-ranging effects on veterans' benefits. Adjustments to how conditions are evaluated, including the consideration of treatment or medication, require careful review to avoid unintended consequences for veterans currently receiving or seeking compensation.

Given the scope and potential impact of these changes, it is important that any updates to the rating schedule be developed through a transparent process with robust stakeholder engagement, including input from veterans service organizations, medical experts, and the veteran community.

AMVETS will continue to monitor this proposal and looks forward to engaging further as the policy discussion develops to ensure that any changes uphold fairness, consistency, and the long-standing principles underlying veterans' disability compensation.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

AMVETS appreciates the Committee's continued leadership in advancing legislation to improve the lives of veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. The proposals considered in this hearing reflect a comprehensive effort to strengthen access to care, modernize VA systems, enhance accountability, and address the evolving needs of the veteran population. From expanding access to specialty care and innovative treatments to supporting caregivers and addressing homelessness, these measures represent meaningful progress toward a more responsive and equitable system.

AMVETS stands ready to work with the Committee, the VA, and other stakeholders to ensure these proposals are implemented effectively and deliver real outcomes for veterans. We thank you for your continued commitment to those who have served and look forward to continued collaboration to advance policies that uphold the promises made to our nation's veterans.

## **About AMVETS**

AMVETS is the most inclusive congressionally chartered veterans service organization in the United States. Our membership is open to all active-duty service members, reservists, guardsmen, and honorably discharged veterans. As a result, AMVETS members have played a vital role in defending our nation in every conflict since World War II.

Our dedication to these men and women dates back to the post-World War II era, when countless returning service members sought access to the health, education, and employment benefits they had earned. Navigating the government bureaucracy to secure these benefits proved challenging for many, prompting experienced veterans to form local groups to assist their peers. As the veteran population surged into the millions, it became evident that a national organization was needed—one distinct from groups that had been established to serve veterans of previous wars. The emerging generation of veterans sought an organization of their own.

With this vision in mind, 18 delegates from nine veterans' clubs convened in Kansas City, Missouri, on December 10, 1944, to establish The American Veterans of World War II. Less than three years later, on July 23, 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed Public Law 216, officially recognizing AMVETS as the first congressionally chartered organization for post-World War II veterans.

Over the years, our congressional charter has been updated to welcome veterans from subsequent conflicts. AMVETS has also evolved to better meet the needs of newer generations of veterans and their families. To further this mission, we maintain partnerships with other congressionally chartered veterans' organizations as part of the "Big Six" coalition. Additionally, we collaborate with newer groups such as Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and The Independence Fund. Our commitment to veterans' well-being is further demonstrated through our partnership with the VA's Office of Suicide Prevention and Mental Health, working to combat the tragic epidemic of veteran suicide.

As AMVETS looks toward the future, we remain steadfast in our dedication to serving those who have defended our nation. We urge the 119th Congress to join us in this commitment by making policy decisions and casting votes that protect and support our veterans.