Easier access for rural veterans

The Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act of 2019—introduced by a bipartisan group of senators—will expand on current initiatives that provide transportation services to veterans living in rural areas and reimbursement for their travel to Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities, Vet Centers and vocational rehabilitation programs. The proposed legislation will also require the VA to develop and pilot an improved protocol for conducting medical exams for volunteer drivers in a more timely manner, an issue that has been a top priority for DAV for years.

If enacted, this bill will extend the VA’s transportation program, which is a complementary asset to the robust, nationwide DAV Transportation Network. Prospective volunteers must undergo a basic physical to screen for underlying medical issues that would jeopardize the safety of veterans, but they have experienced issues with timeliness and consistency of the exam requirements.

“DAV has long advocated for all veterans to have access to high-quality health care, no matter where they live,” said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Randy Reese. “We applaud the introduction of this legislation, as it would help expand the reach of DAV’s Transportation Network, which provided veterans with more than 615,000 rides to VA medical centers last year alone, and to better serve veterans living in rural areas. We are grateful to Sens. [John] Tester,

DAV supports this legislation based on Resolution Number 330, which calls on the VA to operate an effective and efficient transportation program for service-connected veterans and simplify travel benefits.

If enacted, the proposed legislation will also extend VA authority to provide grants that allow veterans service organizations and state veterans service agencies to explore new approaches to provide transportation or travel assistance to rural veterans.

The Rural Veterans Transportation Enhancement Act would:

- Expand eligibility for reimbursements to veterans and eligible beneficiaries for travel to VA Vet Centers for mental health care and counseling.
- Make permanent the Veterans Transportation Service program, which allows local VA facilities to hire drivers and purchase vehicles to transport veterans to their appointments.
- Require the Government Accounting Office to examine VA transportation programs.
- Expedite the physical examination process for volunteer drivers serving veterans through the DAV Transportation Network.
- Extend a grant program that allows veterans service organizations and state veterans service agencies to explore new approaches to provide transportation or travel assistance to rural veterans.

Learn more

To follow along with this and other veterans legislation, sign
up for DAV CAN (Commander’s Action Network) at DAVCAN.org.