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## **Legislative Victories for Veterans in 2021, the First Session of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress**

Since 1920, DAV has been a leader in the development and strengthening of federal programs, benefits, health care and transition services for the men and women who served, their families and survivors. With more than 1 million members, DAV influences federal laws approved by Congress and federal regulations and policies of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other federal agencies affecting wounded, ill and injured veterans.

This is an overview of key legislation enacted into law during the first session of the 117th Congress.

### **Disability Compensation**

- S. 189, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2021, was enacted on October 8, 2021, and became Public Law 117-45. It provided an increase of nearly 6% for all disability compensation rates effective December 1, 2021. DAV supported and testified on this bill in accord with 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 070, Support Legislation to Provide for Realistic Cost-of-Living Allowances. To view the bill, [click here](#).

### **Dependents and Survivors**

- S. 1095, the Colonel John M. McHugh Tuition Fairness for Survivors Act of 2021, impacts individuals who are entitled to educational assistance under the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance program. VA must disapprove courses of education provided by public institutions of higher learning if such institutions charge a higher rate for tuition and fees than in-state tuition. DAV supported and testified on this bill in accord with 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 398, Support Legislation to Improve and Protect Education and Employment Benefits for Disabled Veterans and Their Survivors. S. 1095 was enacted on November 30, 2021 and became Public Law 117-68. To view the bill, [click here](#).

### **Education & Employment**

- H.R. 2523, the Training in High-demand Roles to Improve Veteran Employment Act or the THRIVE Act, mandates VA to update training and education policies and programs. This impacts VA's rapid retraining assistance program and notes that the list of high-demand occupations must be prepared in conjunction with the Department of Labor. DAV supported this legislation in accord with 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 202, Support the Adoption of Programs and Legislation to Reduce Barriers to Employment/ Education and Full Use and Access to Other Benefits Earned Through Service in the United States Military. H.R. 2523 was enacted on June 8, 2021 and became Public Law 117-16. To view the bill, [click here](#).

- S. 894, the Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021, requires VA to consult with the Department of Defense (DOD) to identify and refer members of the Armed Forces with health care occupations for employment with the VA during their separation from the Armed Forces. DAV supported and testified on this legislation in accord with 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 077, Require the Department of Veterans Affairs to Increase Efficiency in the Recruitment/Hiring and Credentialing of Certain Health Care Professionals Undergoing Separation from the Armed Services. S. 894 was enacted on November 30, 2021 and became Public Law 117-67. To view the bill, [click here.](#)
- H.R. 5545, the Responsible Education Mitigating Options and Technical Extensions Act or REMOTE Act, extends vital protections for student veterans by extending remote learning waivers and ensuring that full housing benefits are given to student veterans as schools continue to conduct virtual classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. DAV supported this bill in accord with 2021-2022 DAV Res. No.174, Support Legislation to Improve and Protect Education and Employment Benefits for Disabled Veterans and their Survivors. H.R. 5545 was enacted on December 21, 2021 and became Public Law 117-76. To view the bill, [click here.](#)

### **Health Care Facilities**

- S. 1910, the Major Medical Facility Authorization Act of 2021, authorized VA to carry out specified major medical facility projects during FY 2021. The bill also indicates the maximum amount that could be spent on each project. DAV supported this bill in accord with 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 065, Support Sufficient, Timely and Predictable Funding for All Department of Veterans Affairs Programs, Benefits and Services. S. 1910 was enacted on July 29, 2021 and became Public Law 117-30. To view the bill, [click here.](#)
- H.R. 1510 directs VA to report on its policies and procedures relating to the usage and maintenance of video cameras for patient safety and law enforcement at VA medical facilities. It was enacted on November 23, 2021 and became Public Law 117-64. To view the bill, [click here!](#)

### **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

- H.R. 2441, the Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021, requires VA to establish and maintain three new centers of the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (RANGE) Program in areas with need for additional mental health care for rural veterans. The RANGE Program serves veterans in rural areas who are experiencing mental illness. DAV supported and testified on this bill in accord with 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 370, Support Program Improvement and Enhanced Resources for Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Programs and Suicide Prevention. H.R. 2441 was enacted on June 30, 2021 and became Public Law 117-21. To view the bill, [click here.](#)

## Minority and Underserved Veterans

- H.R. 2093, the Veterans and Family Information Act of 2021, requires VA to make all of its fact sheets available in English, Spanish, Tagalog, and each of the 10 most commonly spoken languages and to establish a publicly available website that provides links to all VA fact sheets. DAV supported and testified on this bill in accord with 2021-2022 DAV Res. No. 504, Support the Translation of Veterans Affairs Literature. H.R. 2093 was enacted on November 22, 2021 and became Public Law 117-62. To view the bill, [click here](#).
- S. 1031 requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study to assess whether there are disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to (1) compensation benefits administered by VA, (2) disability ratings determined by the VA, and (3) the rejection of fully developed claims for VA benefits. DAV supported and testified on this bill in accord with 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 373, Support Equity in Access to Services and Benefits for Racial and Ethnic Minority Service-Connected Veterans. S. 1031 was enacted on November 23, 2021 and became Public Law 117-66. To view the bill, [click here](#).

## Women Veterans

- S. 796, the Protecting Moms Who Served Act of 2021, requires VA to implement the maternity care coordination program and VA must provide community maternity care providers with training and support with respect to the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum veterans, particularly regarding mental and behavioral health conditions. DAV supported and testified on this bill in accord with 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 020 Support Enhanced Medical Services and 2019-2021 DAV Res. No. 133, Benefits for Women Veterans. S. 796 was enacted on November 30, 2021 and became Public Law 117-69. To view the bill, [click here](#).

## Veterans Provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2022

The National Defense Authorization Act was enacted on December 27, 2021 and became Public Law 117-81. To view the bill, [click here](#). Although this bill is specific to the DOD, there were many provisions specific to veterans and burn pit exposure on active duty, including those noted below:

- **Section 551. Troops-to-Teachers Program**—Troops to Teachers supports veterans transitioning to careers in education for over 27 years. This section reauthorizes the program until July 1, 2025.
- **Section 584. Updates and preservation of memorials to chaplains at Arlington National Cemetery**—This section authorizes updates to Chaplain's Hill at Arlington; however, this will come at no cost to the federal government. It requires private funding.

- **Section 725. Mandatory Training on Health Effects of Burn Pits**—DOD shall provide mandatory training to all medical providers on the potential health effects of burn pits.
- **Section 740. Study on Incidence of Breast Cancer among Members of the Armed Forces Serving on Active Duty**—This section requires an assessment of the current mammography screening policies to include the feasibility of adding all of those who served in areas with open burn pits.
- **Section 741. Government Accountability Office (GAO) biennial study on Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) program**—The ILER program allows DOD to identify toxic exposures of service members. However, the program currently tracks those who have served within the last 10 years and those currently serving. The GAO study will assess several key statistics, costs, effectiveness and the feasibility of including past generations of veterans.
- **Section 6601. Eligibility of certain individuals who served with special guerrilla units or irregular forces in Laos for interment in national cemeteries**—An individual who served honorably with a special guerilla unit or irregular force operating from Laos in support of the U.S. Armed Forces during the period of February 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975, and resided in the United States at the time of death may be eligible for interment in national cemeteries.
- **Section 6602. Expansion of scope of VA open burn pit registry to include open burn pits in Egypt and Syria**—VA's Burn Pit and Airborne Hazards registry will now recognize Egypt and Syria as locations that had active burn pits.
- **Section 6605. National Global War on Terrorism Memorial**—Authorizes the National Global War on Terrorism Memorial to be located on the national mall in Washington DC.