

**Department of Pennsylvania
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Pennsylvania Legislative Program
2023 – 2024**

At the State / Department level, we tend to focus on state legislation which is often overlooked from a national's viewpoint – beyond the fact there is competent staff at the national level to manage the federal legislative needs. However, there are four current legislative issues of importance to many in Pennsylvania that I think need urgent resolution through legislation, as the Honor the PACT Act absorbs the majority of the VA's attention.

1. Federal Legislation Needed:

- a. **S. 344/HR 1282 (Major Richard Star Act):** A bill to provide for concurrent receipt of veterans' disability compensation and retired pay for disability retirees with fewer than 20 years of service and a combat-related disability, and for other purposes.
- b. **HR 592:** H.R. 608 which would terminate the Electronic Health Record (EHR) Modernization Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs needs to be stopped dead in its tracks. The VA needs a modern health records management system which can integrate properly with DoD and the private sector if improvement in VA healthcare is wanted. The VA's inability to get a new system off the ground in a timely manner is not a reason to give up. H.R. 592 is meant to address this issue.
- c. **Amendment to Public Law No: 117-168. (Honor our PACT Act):** We have talked to DMVA about the need to press the issue of adding a presumptive condition for melanoma for Vietnam War veterans as occurred for those of the Gulf War era. The result is inertia presently.
- d. **VA Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) restart:** In technical violation of this study commissioned by the Mission Act of 2018, key senators terminated the “base realignment and closure”-like bill in mid-2022. It needs to resume to its logical conclusion so transparent debate can be made on a process now hidden from view. The importance? Pennsylvania is significantly affected by VA plans for the new healthcare system it is developing.

I integrate my efforts at a state level with the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council, the State Veterans' Commission, and various advocacy nonprofits, such as the Lehigh Valley Military Affairs Council. There are many legislative efforts, but four have risen of more immediate importance to veterans and requiring concerted attention at the moment (Funding for our department veterans service officers is now a managed issue and no longer a concern.).

2. State Legislation Needed:

- a. **H.B 363/S.B. 126:** Both involve eliminating VA disability income as a consideration when applying for Pennsylvania benefits affected by level of income. However, the bills as constructed fail to account for veterans' pensions and military medical retiree (disability) pay – among those probably most in need of this provision. We are attempting to resolve this.
- b. **Disabled Americans Veterans Transportation line item:** Transportation services to get veterans to their claims and healthcare appointments has finally gotten some attention, but concrete actions are still lacking. One means is improving and replacing the existing but aging fleet of Veterans Transportation Service vehicles primarily provided by the DAV, but telehealth and other providers are also affecting the extent. A meeting with VISN-4 is to be requested to determine what is really needed for a line-item increase to the 2023-2024 budget.
- c. **Gulf Wars and Afghanistan Conflict bonus** (ca 11 September 2001 to 11 September 2022): The time has come to resolve this legislative issue if the benefit derived from it is to have its intended effect. Again, as with the Persian Gulf War bonus, the state government sits and waits on us to complain. It will require a public referendum, a long and slow process. So, we must act now.

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