



5 May 2016

Honorable John Isakson
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen Isakson and Ranking Member Blumenthal:

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard, the National Guard Association of the United States and Reserve Officers Association ask for support of several Department of Veterans Affairs' legislative proposals. The proposals were part of VA's budget submission and they would help Guard and Reserve servicemembers.

The proposed telehealth expansion will help Guard and Reserve members who often times live in more rural areas. Dr. Craig Bryan, executive director of the National Center for Veteran Studies told *Defense One*, "There's a growing amount of data—including our own research—that the Guard and Reserve soldiers are unique, with different stressors and problems. They're more likely to be living in rural areas and in smaller communities where there isn't necessarily a high density of other military families," Bryan said. "Some might have to drive many hours for treatment and support specific to veterans under the [Department of Veterans Affairs] system.

VA Telehealth National Expansion: Would authorize a "covered health care professional" to deliver care via telemedicine to any VA patient or beneficiary using telecommunications technology and information technology, regardless of the location of the patient or provider.

The next proposal provides more time for follow-up medical examinations will give members of the Guard and Reserve an opportunity to stabilize their transition to civilian life and tackle their PTSD. As noted in the study, *Delayed-onset post-traumatic stress disorder among war veterans in primary care clinics*, delayed treatment or seeking of disability benefits or delayed onset of any symptoms of PTSD may occur after 6 months.

Extend the Time for Medical Examinations for Certain Veterans with Mental Disorders: Requires VA to schedule a medical examination for Veterans discharged from the military due to a mental disorder no later than 18 months (rather than 6 months) after separation or discharge of such Veteran from active duty. No benefit costs are associated with this proposal.

Our associations appreciate the National Cemetery Administration has requested the following proposal. It is inconceivable that Guard and Reserve members have not previously qualified for the

Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) considering their service fulfils the purpose that *“It honors the memory of a deceased honorably discharged Veteran and expresses the country's grateful recognition of his or her service in the Armed Forces”*. Congressional members will surely want to right this wrong.

Align Eligibility for Burial and Presidential Memorial Certificates for Members of the Reserve Components of the Armed Forces: Provides a Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) to eligible recipients of the reserve components of the Armed Forces of the United States, Army or Air National Guard, and the Reserve Officers' Training Corps who are eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. Costs are estimated to be insignificant.

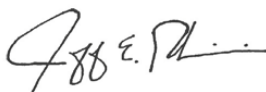
The final two proposals make changes to include in title 38 activation authorities that were recently added to title 10. Both of the proposals are supported by the Department of Defense.

Add Section 12304(b) of Title 10 to the List of Authorities that Qualify as Active Duty for Post-9/11 GI Bill Eligibility: Adds members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces, service on active duty under a call or order to active duty under section 12304b of title 10 to title 38, for education benefits. Costs are estimated to be \$17.2 million in 2018, \$123.1 million over 5 years and \$340.2 million over 10 years.

Extend the Eligibility Period for VR&E Benefits for Certain Members of the Reserve Component: Includes the same eligibility period for vocational rehabilitation benefits as other Guard and Reserve who are activated or ordered to active duty under 10 U.S.C. § 12304a and § 12304b. There are minimal costs under this proposal, as nearly all eligible Veterans utilize benefits within their 12-year delimiting date.

Our associations combined membership of approximately 150,000 members, represent over 1,200,000 participating and retired Guard and Reserve members, who would be favorably affected by these proposals. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation and past support to Guard and Reserve veterans. Please have your staff call Susan Lukas, ROA's legislative director, at 202-646-7713 or slukas@roa.org, for any assistance.

Sincerely,



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(Ret)
Executive Director
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