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Crucial Veterans' Bill Clears House, But Senate Fate Is Unclear: Take Action NOW

Bipartisan, MOAA-supported legislation offering comprehensive improvements to veteran and



caregiver benefits across the VA – from long-term care to mental health services to employment programs and much more – passed the House on Nov. 18 by a 389-9 vote and heads to the Senate with only a handful of days remaining on the legislative calendar.

The Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act ([H.R. 8371](#)) offers a lifeline for all types of VA beneficiaries and has the support of more than 50 organizations. Its movement through the House is thanks to the dedicated efforts of House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) leaders along with the work of MOAA and partner organizations. Learn more about the array of programs in the omnibus legislation [at this link](#).

[TAKE ACTION: [Ask Your Lawmakers to Support the Dole Act](#)]

“MOAA is honored to have joined forces with fellow veteran groups and leaders in both the House and Senate to champion the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act,” MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly, USAF (Ret),

said. “As we celebrate National Family Caregivers Month, we must recognize the profound positive impact this bill will have on the health and well-being of our veterans, their caregivers, and survivors.”

Kelly thanked HVAC Chairman Rep. Mike Bost (R-Ill.) and Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.), the committee’s ranking member, for their work leading the bill through the House.

“The need to pass this critical bipartisan legislation has never been greater,” Kelly added, “and now is the time to act.”

The Dole Act offers needed improvements for veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors who depend on VA health care and benefits — improvements ranging from claims processing reforms, expansion of veteran caregiving and caregiver support services, and resources for homeless veterans and surviving family members.

MOAA and fellow veterans groups have worked relentlessly in the 118th Congress to secure this omnibus legislation; without it, veterans and their families may face uncertainty and hardship, especially those who rely solely on VA health care and benefits for their livelihood.

Senate Action Needed NOW

Despite bipartisan progress in the House – both [Republicans](#) and [Democrats](#) on the HVAC published press releases lauding the bill’s passage – the Dole Act’s path to the president’s desk is far from guaranteed. It must pass the Senate, which has just 15 in-session days on its schedule after Nov. 22 and a number of competing priorities, to include budget and authorization work.

With the legislative session nearing its end, the Senate must act swiftly to pass the Dole Act. The window to pass significant veterans’ legislation is rapidly closing, and immediate action by the Senate is essential.

Passing this legislation during National Family Caregivers Month and enacting it ahead of the holidays sends a strong message of our nation’s commitment to the veteran community and provides a gift of hope for a brighter future.

Join MOAA and [reach out to your lawmakers](#) today. Urge them to take immediate action and pass the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act.

DOD Installation access simplified: Three updates for Veterans and caregivers

Veterans and eligible caregivers will soon have easier access to Department of Defense (DOD) installations for Veterans. Beginning Nov. 1, 2024, the updated process announced by VA and DOD will streamline both enrollment and access to installations. More information can be found in [DOD’s fact sheet](#).

DOD installations provide important services to Veterans and their caregivers, such as health care, shopping, and certain Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) services, like golf courses, movie theaters and clubs. Recently, VA and DOD worked together to increase health care access for Veterans in [Alabama](#), the [Gulf Coast](#) and [Tampa](#) regions of Florida, as well as [Kentucky](#), [New York's Hudson Valley](#), [Tennessee](#) and [Virginia](#).

Updates to DOD Installation access enrollment

Eligible Veterans who do not have a VA-issued [Veteran Health Identification Card](#) (VHIC)—as well as eligible caregivers—can now enroll for installation access at the visitor center using their [REAL ID](#) Act-compliant driver's license or non-driver's identification card. This means these individuals no longer need to present a VA-issued caregiver patronage letter, VA-issued service-connected disability letter, or VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A to enroll for installation access.

To enroll for reoccurring installation access, eligible Veterans and caregivers must establish identity, fitness, and purpose on their first visit to each DOD installation they wish to access at the visitor's center. As part of enrollment, you must:

1. Present an acceptable credential (VHIC or REAL ID) to establish identity;
2. Undergo an on-the-spot criminal record and terrorism check to establish fitness; and
3. Have your eligibility for on-installation benefits verified electronically to establish purpose. If your purpose is for health care, and the DOD installation doesn't have a commissary, exchange or authorized MWR service, then proof of appointment will need to be provided.

More information on Veteran and caregiver eligibility can be found [online](#).

Updates to DOD installation access

When entering a DOD installation, Veteran and caregiver eligibility is now verified electronically. Following enrollment for reoccurring installation access, Veterans and eligible caregivers can enter the installation by presenting the same VHIC or REAL ID they enrolled with.

Enrollment is typically valid for one to three years, or one year after the last visit to the given DOD installation. If a patron's VHIC or REAL ID expires, they will need to reenroll with their new VHIC or REAL ID. Termination of a [patron's eligibility](#) will automatically result in the termination of installation access enrollment.

If your VHIC has recently expired or is expiring soon, learn more about [how to renew it](#).
Additional requirements for accessing Commissary, Exchange and MWR services



Veterans who do not have a VHIC—and their eligible caregivers—will still need to provide a hard copy letter (a VA-issued caregiver patronage letter, VA-issued service-connected disability letter, or a VA Health Eligibility Center Form H623A) to show eligibility and to access commissary, exchange or authorized MWR services, as these facilities cannot electronically verify eligibility.

Currently, for purposes of MWR, commissary and exchange shopping, eligible caregivers are those who are approved and designated as a primary family caregiver of an eligible Veteran under VA's [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#).

Learn more about commissary and exchange privileges for Veterans [online](#). Veterans with additional questions are encouraged to contact their local installation for further assistance or visit www.militaryonesource.mil.

Disclaimer: A portion of this story was generated by AI. None of the data we reported included personal or sensitive information, and it was fact-checked and edited by a human copy editor prior to publishing.

**“Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, being men of courage, be strong.”
1Cor 16:13**

Sincerely,

William A. Harris, Jr.

William A. Harris, Jr.

William A. Harris, Jr., USAF Retired

President, Veterans for Christ, Inc.

www.veteransforchristinc.org

Need to contact VA?

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, Chat, or Text 838255

Homeless Veteran Resources: 1-877-424-3838 or Chat

White House VA Hotline: 1-855-948-2311

1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411) is never the wrong number