Paralyzed Veterans of America

Issue 19 • Volume 34 November 17, 2026

Washington Update

Check out the PVAction Force page to view petitions, legislative campaigns, and a list of key legislation.

2027 Veteran COLA Bill Approved

Members of Congress returned to Capitol Hill the week of November 9 for a lame duck session of Congress following the November 3 midterm elections. One of Congress's first actions was to approve the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) of 2026 Act (H.R. 8552). It raises VA benefits like disability compensation, clothing allowance, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) by the same rate as the annual Social Security cost-of-living increase. Next year's figure, which was announced on October 14 by the Social Security Administration, is 3.6 percent. The bill now heads to the president for his signature.

Major Richard Star Act Passes House

On November 12, the day after Veteran's Day, the House overwhelmingly voted to pass the Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 2102, as amended by H. Res. 1247) and send it to the Senate for consideration. If the Senate votes to pass the Major Richard Star Act, it will then go to President Trump to be signed into law. The Major Richard Star Act is a bipartisan bill that would allow combat injured veterans, who were medically retired due to their injuries prior to reaching 20 years of active duty, to receive their full VA disability compensation and their military retirement. Currently, only veterans with disability ratings above 50 percent and more than 20 years of service are eligible to receive the full amount of their Department of Defense retirement and VA disability payments—leaving behind more than 50,000 combat-injured military retirees. The bill does not include a way to pay for the benefits change and its future is uncertain.

Prior to the House's passage of the Major Richard Star Act, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released their estimated cost for this version of the bill. CBO estimates that the Major Richard Star Act would increase direct spending by $12.75 billion (or about $13 billion) over the 2027–2036 period. The estimate applies to approximately 58,000 Chapter 61 medically retired veterans with combat-related disabilities and fewer than 20 years of service who currently receive Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC). An earlier, broader interpretation of the bill's initial text that included all 255,000+ Chapter 61 retirees without service limits carried a much higher estimated price tag of $78.1 billion over 2026–2036. To read the full cost estimate, click here.

House Passes Veterans Omnibus

In a move that was viewed by many as controversial, the House passed the Taking Care of America's Veterans Act (TCAVA) by a voice vote on Veteran's Day. A recorded vote was not taken as no one on the floor requested it. TCAVA includes over 60 pieces of veteran legislation, many of which are supported by PVA, that would make

improvements to healthcare, benefits, and education programs throughout the VA. TCAVA also includes a version of the Major Richard Star Act, which would allow combat injured veterans to receive the entirety of their VA and Department of Defense benefits. However, PVA is one of many veterans organizations that has concerns about TCAVA due to the bill's changes to disability compensation for future veterans. These changes would create a way to pay for the bill's new spending. Veterans organizations are split over the bill's funding provision. The bill now moves on to the Senate where it faces an uncertain path forward.

Another House-passed bill waiting in the Senate is the Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act (H.R. 6047). This important legislation would provide long-overdue updates to Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) for the most severely disabled veterans and strengthen Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving spouses and families. This legislation is one of the many bills also included in TCAVA. PVA will continue to advocate for passage of meaningful legislation for veterans with catastrophic disabilities before the end of the 119th Congress.

PVA Releases First Volume of Hotel Best Practices Guide

On November 9, PVA released the first volume of its *Best Practices in Hotel Accessibility Guide*, a free resource designed to help hotels identify and address common barriers that make travel unsafe, uncomfortable, or even impossible for guests with mobility disabilities. The first installment focuses on the lived experiences of people who use wheelchairs, scooters, canes, and other mobility devices. It offers practical recommendations hotels can implement to create a more accessible, welcoming guest experience.

PVA is introducing the guide at hotel and hospitality industry conferences and events to raise awareness of the barriers travelers with mobility disabilities encounter, and to share recommendations to improve accessibility. Our first official stop was the TravelAbility Conference in Tampa, Florida, on November 9, where PVA's Senior Advocacy Attorney Danica Gonzalves presented on the importance of accessibility from a business perspective.

PVA Presents at International Accessible Air Travel Conference

On October 14-15, Heather Ansley, Chief Policy Officer, attended the 2026 International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)/Airports Council International (ACI) /International Air Transport Association (IATA) Symposium on Accessibility in International Civil Aviation in Montreal, Canada. Under the Theme: "Advancing Global Commitment to Inclusive and Universally Accessible Air Transport for All," the Symposium examined progress achieved since the first global gathering, identified persistent barriers, and supported member nations in implementing harmonized, end to end solutions in line with ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices.

On the second day of the event, Ms. Ansley participated in a panel on collaborative governance and strengthening global partnerships. During the panel, the discussion explored how these relationships can create meaningful action so passengers with disabilities can travel with dignity. Other panelists included Alan Campbell, Senior Manager International Affairs, International Airlines Group (IAG); Julie McGuinness, ESG Manager, Dublin Airport; and Mark De Laurentiis, Director of Passenger Rights Protection Department, ENAC, Italy.

VA Successfully Deploys Its New EHR to More Locations

In May 2018, VA began a multiyear effort to migrate veterans' health data to a modern electronic health record (EHR) that will give VA providers secure access to a patient's complete medical history from the time they entered military service through their transition to veteran status and beyond. VA started deploying its new EHR in October 2020 at select VA medical facilities out west but ran into problems which forced the department to pause the effort for an extended period until problems with it were resolved.

This spring, VA resumed its rollout and successfully launched the new EHR system at four hospitals in Michigan. That was quickly followed with deployments at four VA hospitals in Ohio and Kentucky (June) and

three more in Indiana (August). In late October, VA deployed the new EHR at the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio, the Alaska VA Healthcare System in Anchorage and 16 standalone clinics associated with those medical centers throughout Ohio and Alaska.

Cleveland is of particular interest to PVA because it is the first location that houses one of VA's 25 spinal cord injuries and disorders centers. Initial reports from VA Central Office are that the rollout in Cleveland was an early success. VA has deployed the new EHR at 13 hospitals this year under the department's accelerated schedule. Their goal is to have the new system fully operational at all VA medical centers by 2031.

News of Note

PVA Participates in Dulles International Airport Walkthrough with ADA Advisory Committee

On October 27, Danica Gonzalves, Senior Advocacy Attorney, participated in a walkthrough of a new terminal at Dulles International Airport in the Washington, DC area. The event was facilitated by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority ADA Advisory Committee. PVA was invited to join the committee earlier in the month. Important accessibility features of the new terminal include access to a universal changing station and two service animal relief areas. We will have the opportunity to participate in additional advisory committee events in the future.

VA Hiring 2,000+ Employees

The VA has announced that it plans to hire more than 2,000 employees in fiscal year (FY) 2027 to process a record number of benefits claims that are expected to be filed in the coming years. VA currently has more than 13,000 employees on board to process these claims. In FY 2026, they processed a record-high 3.1 million compensation and pension claims. The volume of claims is expected to rise, in part, because VA is undertaking an effort to contact and enroll veterans in its system. For example, in FY 2026 alone, VA launched a campaign to reach unenrolled veterans featuring more than 11,000 live events. In response to these efforts, VA received more than 3.15 million claims submissions in FY 2026, an 80 percent increase from FY 2022. Also, more than 300,000 new veterans have enrolled in VA healthcare so far in calendar year 2026.

VA Debuts Pilot Program for Private Medical Records

The VA is testing a secure, faster, more convenient way to collect a veteran's private medical records. The Medical Evidence Retrieval and Analysis (MERA) pilot is a 30-day pilot that began on October 21 to see if VA can facilitate collecting private medical records faster using SyncMD. Currently, private medical record retrieval is one of the most persistent friction points in the disability claims process. Veterans and their representatives are often asked to track down records from multiple providers, complete repetitive authorization paperwork, and wait while records move through mail and fax between offices. That burden falls on the veteran at a point when they're already navigating a complex system. MERA would be a faster, more convenient way to collect a veteran's private medical records with SyncMD. SyncMD allows veterans to authorize VA to retrieve medical records electronically. The pilot is intentionally limited to 1,000 veterans who have active Intents to File and no pending claims. This is a controlled test and does not represent a broader change to VA policy or processes.

NFHA Publishes 2026 Fair Housing Trends Report Highlighting First Year of Refusals of Agency Participation

On October 28, the National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) published its 2026 Fair Housing Trends Report. In the report, NFHA highlighted that for the first time since 1996, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) declined to provide important federal complaint data that NFHA requested leading to gaps in the findings on housing discrimination. NFHA was still able to compile DOJ statistics from public records, but HUD and Fair Housing Assistance Program data were unavailable. The report did find that more than 55 percent of the 2025 fair housing complaints involved disability discrimination, making it the most frequently cited basis for discrimination. The report also found that a majority

of NFHA member organizations reported services had to be cut due to funding disruptions, and almost half of Fair Housing Initiatives Program grant recipients experienced delays of up to six months.

PVA Presents to Alaska/Hawaiian Airlines Disability Advisory Board in Seattle

On October 26-27, Heather Ansley, Chief Policy Officer, attended the Alaska/Hawaiian Airlines Disability Advisory Board meeting in Seattle. During the meeting, attendees heard accessibility updates from the airline. Topics included accessible lavatories, hands-on training for assisting wheelchair users, and digital access improvements. Participants also had the opportunity to receive disability access updates from Boeing at their Customer Experience Center. The center includes a 787 mockup and 777X mockup. On the second day of the meeting, Ms. Ansley presented to the Board members and Alaska/Hawaiian staff about the experience of PVA members in air travel, including ways to make improvements both today and in the future for wheelchair users.

Surveys and Committee Activities

Wheelchair Users: Tell the SecureRide Coalition How You Get Secured

The SecureRide Coalition wants to hear how getting secured goes on buses, paratransit, and ride-hailing trips, good rides and bad. Your answers will help make securement faster, safer, and more independent. The survey is open through December 4 to U.S. adults who use a prescribed wheelchair. It takes about 20 to 30 minutes to complete and is confidential. Click here to take the survey.

Collecting Voting Experiences Post Midterm Elections

Now that the 2026 midterm elections have ended, PVA National would like to hear about your voting experience. We want to know it all, the good, bad and ugly. Please email Advocacy Attorney Anthonya Hollins anthonyaj@pva.org to share your disability voting experience stories.

Veterans' Committee Activities

Please visit the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on previous and upcoming hearings and markups.