STATEMENT OF
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THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
ON
H.R. 2818 TO AMEND TITLE 38, USC, TO PROVIDE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EPILEPSY CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA) OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA); HR 5554, VETERANS SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS PREVENTION AND TREATMENT ACT OF 2008; H.R. 5595, MAKE OUR VETERANS SMILE ACT OF 2008; and H.R. 5730, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO DISPLAY IN EACH PROSTHETIC AND ORTHOTIC CLINIC OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS IN INJURED AND AMPUTEE VETERANS BILL OF RIGHTS

APRIL 15, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit The American Legion's views on the issues under consideration by this Subcommittee.

H.R. 2818

This bill seeks to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the establishment of Epilepsy Centers of Excellence within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This bill would also ensure that the proposed Epilepsy Centers of Excellence function as such in research, education, and clinical care activities in the diagnosis and treatment of epilepsy.

According to VA research approximately 53 percent of veterans who suffered a penetrating Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in Vietnam developed epilepsy within 15 years. VA, in its effort to treat this condition, became the leader in epilepsy research. However, due to lack of funding, research resources eventually diminished.

According to the American Academy of Neurology (AAN), returning veterans with TBI injuries will eventually develop Post Traumatic Epilepsy (PTE). Currently, there is an increasing need for the presence of Epilepsy Centers throughout the nation. This is due to the high count of Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) troops returning with TBI.

The American Legion supports the establishment of Centers of Excellence within VA for the various injuries related to blast trauma. This would also ensure the best quality of care and

treatment is accessible to current and future veterans suffering from the effects of blast injuries, to include epilepsy.

H.R. 5554

This bill seeks to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand and improve health care services available to veterans from VA for substance abuse disorders, and for other purposes. This bill also proposes that the medical center provides ready access to a full continuum of care for substance use disorders for veterans in need of such care. H.R. 5554 also proposes a pilot program for internet-based substance use disorder treatment for OIF/OEF veterans.

If approved, these pilot programs will be located within those medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs that have established Centers of Excellence for Substance Abuse Treatment and Education or that have established a Substance Abuse Program Evaluation and Research Center.

The American Legion has no official position on this issue. However, when substance abuse disorders are secondary to service-connected conditions, it is our position that veterans should have full access to the quality and adequate health care in which they are entitled.

H.R. 5595

This bill seeks to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide dental care to veterans with service-connected disabilities, and for other purposes.

The American Legion has no official position on this issue.

H.R. 5730

This bill seeks to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to display in each prosthetic and orthotic clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs an Injured and Amputee Veterans Bill of Rights.

The American Legion has no official position on this issue.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, The American Legion sincerely appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony and looks forward to working with you and your colleagues to resolve these critical issues. Thank you.