March 19, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-221 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

As leaders of the nation's veterans service organizations (VSOs), we write to offer our support for the compromise veterans provisions that have been proposed to be included as part of the omnibus appropriations bill expected to be considered by Congress this week.

While no compromise is ever perfect, we believe that the language to consolidate and reform VA's community care programs, to systematically review and strengthen VA's infrastructure and to provide greater fairness and support for caregivers of disabled veterans from all eras would be major improvements for the men and women who served, their families and survivors. We urge you to take advantage of this historic opportunity to support those who have worn the uniform.

Over the past year, we have been involved in numerous discussions, round tables and hearings regarding all three major elements of the proposed veterans legislation. We have each provided feedback and recommendations to strengthen and improve bills addressing these reforms. While none of us had all of our recommendations accepted, both the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs made significant changes to improve the various bills and to address our concerns. We believe that the final compromise language under consideration will measurably improve the lives of millions of veterans today and in the future.

The proposed creation of a new, consolidated community care program based on integrated networks of VA and community providers represents a balanced approach to ensuring timely access to all enrolled veterans, while continuing to strengthen the VA health care system that millions of veterans choose and rely on. The legislation will ensure that veterans who cannot get appointments or services at VA will have the choice to use qualified community providers.

The infrastructure review section of this legislation has been significantly improved since the first draft bill was proposed in the House. The current proposal includes meaningful stakeholder involvement, transparency and other safeguards in the review process to ensure that the final result will lead to a stronger, more focused, better aligned VA infrastructure designed to support the delivery of care to veterans when and where they need it.

Finally, the phased expansion of VA's comprehensive caregiver assistance program to caregivers of seriously injured pre-9/11 veterans will have tremendous impact on the lives of thousands of deserving men and women who are currently ineligible. Together with provisions requiring VA to update its IT systems, this section will truly help to fulfill our promises to all the men and women who served, as well as their family caregivers.

Although this veterans legislation has only recently been shared with our organizations, it is based on months and months of consultation with our organizations and many other stakeholders. While not perfect, we believe that this legislation represents a fair compromise that will help to strengthen veterans health care for future generations, while ensuring that caregivers of veterans of all generations get the support they deserve.

We hope you will support this important legislation for the men and women who served.

Respectfully,

Verna L. Jones
Executive Director
The American Legion

Joseph R. Chenelly
Executive Director
AMVETS

Garry J. Augustine
Washington Executive Director
DAV (Disabled American Veterans)

Dana T. Atkins
Lieutenant General, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)
President
Military Officers Association of America

Carl Blake
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America

Robert E. Wallace
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars
of the United States

Rick Weidman
Executive Director for Policy
Vietnam Veterans of America

Rene Bardof
Senior Vice President
Government & Community Relations
Wounded Warrior Project