



# Washington Update

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## ANNUAL DEFENSE POLICY BILL SIGNED INTO LAW

Late last month, the President signed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This annual bill authorizes a host of Pentagon programs and weapons systems but occasionally contains items affecting veterans as well. Below is a listing of some provisions of interest to PVA:

- Authorization to build a Global War on Terrorism Memorial on the National Mall— This is the initial part of a long and complicated 24-step process that will include approvals from the National Capital Planning Commission and the National Park Service before the monument can be built. The Memorial, which is to be built using private donations, will honor all who have served and sacrificed in the ongoing international military campaign to defeat terrorists intending to harm our country and its citizens.
- Waiver of National Park Fees—This provision permanently waives national park fees for any veteran or Gold Star family

member. It also gives free annual passes to active-duty military for national parks and federal recreational lands.

- Burn Pit Registry—This provision directs VA to include in its open burn pit registry locations where they were used in Egypt and Syria.
- Housing Modifications for Military Families— This provision includes PVA-endorsed legislation introduced by Representatives Stephanie Bice (R-OK) and Sara Jacobs (D-CA) to protect military families from being charged for home modifications needed by a family member with a disability.

The bill is more than 900 pages long, but a comprehensive summary of it is available [here](#).

## BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO ADDRESS DIRECT CARE WORKER SHORTAGE

On December 7, Representatives Matt Cartwright (D-PA) and David McKinley (R-WV) introduced H.R.6149, the Improving Care for Vulnerable Older Citizens and People with Disabilities through



Workforce Advancement Act of 2021. The legislation builds on preliminary research suggesting that providing direct care workers with career advancement opportunities would improve an array of outcomes, from increasing job satisfaction and retention to reductions in emergency room admissions and health care costs. It would create a demonstration program to test the impact of additional training, compensation, and professional roles on direct care workers. A press release on the bill's introduction can be found [here](#).

### **U.S. ACCESS BOARD/DOT HOST PUBLIC MEETING TO GATHER ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT AIRCRAFT ONBOARD WHEELCHAIR REQUIREMENTS**

On December 16, PVA Deputy Executive Director Shaun Castle spoke during a public meeting sponsored by the U.S. Access Board and the Department of Transportation (DOT) regarding the design of aircraft onboard wheelchairs. PVA feels very strongly that the onboard wheelchair is a crucial link in ensuring proper and dignified access to accessible lavatories. Twin-aisle aircraft are already required to have accessible lavatories and a very small number of single-aisle aircraft have them as well.

DOT is slated to put out a proposed rule for public comment soon about requiring larger single-aisle aircraft to have an accessible lavatory. In his comments, Mr. Castle noted that an aircraft with a fully accessible lavatory that includes no safe or dignified way to reach it would only continue to put lavatory access out of reach of passengers who require an onboard wheelchair.

Lavatory access is important for all air travel passengers, including those with disabilities. As part of a recent, informal survey, PVA and other disability organizations sought to learn about the current air travel experience of passengers with disabilities. Out of 1,034 respondents, 647 individuals or 63 percent said that they have avoided air travel because they have no access to the lavatory during flight. Of 1,232 respondents, 592 individuals or 48 percent said that no lavatory access by itself was reason enough not to travel by air unless absolutely necessary.

Overall, the current onboard wheelchair provides minimal to no support depending on the passenger's disability. PVA believes that the onboard wheelchairs that are in use today need to be improved significantly to ensure safe egress and access to the lavatory without putting a passenger with a disability at risk. Mr. Castle noted that PVA believes the Access Board's Advisory Guidelines for onboard wheelchairs would make critically needed improvements to these devices and encouraged DOT to adopt those guidelines rather than using broad performance standards.

### **NEWS OF NOTE**

#### **DOJ Updates Common Questions About COVID and the ADA**

The Justice Department has updated its "[Common Questions About COVID and the ADA](#)" to address two COVID-era issues affecting people with disabilities: first, ensuring that medical facilities' visitor policies take into account the rights of people with disabilities to receive equal access to care; and second, ensuring that outdoor retail or dining spaces (sometimes called "streeteries") are accessible to people with disabilities and do not prevent individuals from using sidewalks and accessible parking.

#### **VA Trust Report**

On December 27, 2021, VA published the VA Trust Report for the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2021. According to the report, more than 75 percent of veterans trust VA. You can find the full report [here](#).

#### **Unemployment Drops Among People with Disabilities**

According to the most recent National Trends in Disability Employment (nTIDE) COVID Update, unemployment rates for people with disabilities have dropped after a pause in October. For the first time, their unemployment levels dipped below pre-pandemic lows, in contrast with their peers without disabilities. The report, produced by the University of New Hampshire and Kessler Foundation, can be found [here](#).

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## Virtual National ADA Symposium

The National ADA Symposium will be held on May 9-13, 2022. It will once again be virtual and will feature three separate tracks on issues related to the Americans with Disabilities Act over the course of four days. The conference will also include two keynote sessions. Registration opens February 1. For more information, click [here](#).

## Caregiver Resources

Several publications of interest to family caregivers have recently been released:

- The National Alliance for Caregiving and Diverse Elders Coalition released a report along with a webinar – Family Caregiving in Diverse Communities – in December 2021 focusing on the experiences of racially and ethnically diverse and LGBTQ+ family caregivers. This [report](#) offers research and ways to ensure systems of services and supports for caregivers will address health disparities and systemic barriers that diverse family caregivers for older adults face. [Read the highlights](#) and [access the webinar recording](#).
- ARCH Respite Care Foundation recently issued Guidelines for Families - [Receiving Respite Care Safely During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). The information is designed to assist families with careful and thoughtful decision making to ensure respite care is received as safely as possible during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Caregiving in Military Families Report was recently released by the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers and Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families. The report can be accessed [here](#).

## AUDIO CHATS, WEBINARS, AND EVENTS

### U.S. Access Board Hosts Event on Equity in Healthcare for People with Disabilities

The U.S. Access Board recently hosted a virtual public event, “Equity in Healthcare for People with Disabilities,” that featured panel presentations on standards, research, and resources related to healthcare accessibility, including inclusive medical equipment, healthcare facility design, information technology, and communication devices and systems. A [recording](#) of the session is available on the Board’s YouTube Channel. Presentation materials are available in [PPT \(16MB\)](#) or [PDF \(5MB\)](#) formats.

### PVA Webinar: Medicare’s Home Health Care Benefits

Did you know that Medicare covers an array of skilled and non-skilled home health care services? There is a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding around this Medicare benefit.

On January 26 from 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET, PVA will host representatives from the Center for Medicare Advocacy who will present an overview of this important benefit, explore some of the myths and misrepresentations surrounding it, and offer resources to which beneficiaries and their families can turn to learn more and overcome challenges they may face in accessing Medicare home health care services.

Joining this webinar from the Center for Medicare Advocacy will be Kathy Holt, MBA, JD, Associate Director, and Wey-Wey Kwok, JD, Senior Attorney.

Click [here](#) to register for this webinar.

### PVA Webinar Recording Now Available on VA's Veterans Transportation Program

PVA recently hosted a webinar on VA’s Veterans Transportation Program. The recording is available [here](#).

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## **New PVA Audio Chat: Housing Accessibility and Home Modifications**

PVA recently hosted an audio chat on Housing Accessibility and Home Modifications. It is now available [here](#).

## **DOT to Host Virtual Workshops on Access to Automated Vehicles**

On January 24 and January 26, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) will host two [virtual workshops](#) highlighting the [ten Semifinalists](#) for DOT's [Inclusive Design Challenge](#). The Challenge aims to generate solutions to enable people with physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities to use automated vehicles to access jobs, healthcare, and other critical destinations. Please join us to learn about the designs and progress and offer real-time feedback. Five teams will present in each session; advanced registration is required.

- Session 1 ([register](#)), Monday, January 24, 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. ET
- Session 2 ([register](#)), Wednesday, January 26, 1:30-3:00 p.m. ET

## **ACL to Host Joint Caregiver Meeting**

On January 25 from 12:30-4:30 p.m. ET, the Administration on Community Living (ACL) will host the first joint meeting of the RAISE Family Caregiving Advisory Council and the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (SGRG), as they come together to begin development of the National Family Caregiving Strategy. The virtual meeting is open to the public. Registration is not required to attend via webinar. The webinar link will be open for access (live) 5 minutes prior to the meeting start time. A copy of the agenda will be posted prior to the meeting. All information for this meeting will be posted on both Council's web pages. For more information, please visit the [RAISE](#) or [SGRG](#) pages.

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