



# AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

## April 9, 2020


Programming Note: We are keeping a close eye on the coronavirus and specifically how it affects veterans. We update our reports daily. Keep up to date with AMVETS COVID-19 Situation Report: <https://amvets.org/coronavirus/>

### News Driving the Week

- The Department of Veterans Affairs is delaying its [multibillion-dollar EHR project](#), Wilkie confirmed in a letter Friday. Congressional staffers had been expecting the change, which Wilkie attributed to reallocating staff to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. While the announcement is the second delay in recent months — with the first coming in February, when the department postponed testing of the new Cerner system due to unspecified concerns from users in Spokane, Wash. — Wilkie says the project is nevertheless progressing. He cites 72 of 73 interfaces being completed, and says a joint HIE with the Department of Defense will come online this month. Wilkie doesn't give an overall schedule for the project. "Cerner is actively working with VA to reassess and revise deployment timelines," Cerner said in a statement, saying that it supported the department's decision.

- Senate Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jerry Moran and members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee sent a letter to Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie urging the VA to use the authority granted in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to [expand telemental health services to veterans](#) during COVID-19. Chairman Moran included a provision in the CARES Act that would permit the VA to form agreements with telecommunications companies to help provide mental health services to veterans isolated due to the risk of spreading COVID-19. Both veterans who live in rural areas and veterans who are experiencing social isolation to prevent the spread of the virus may experience increased mental health challenges; this provision allows veterans to access the care they need during this time.

- The Department of Veterans Affairs is ending a decades-old practice of [allowing veterans service representatives to review benefits decisions](#) for accuracy before those decisions are finalized and sent to veterans. Paul Lawrence, the VA undersecretary of benefits, announced the change at a meeting with veterans groups last week. It will take effect at the end of April. The VA decided to make the change because its online claims system made the 48-hour review process "obsolete," said VA



Press Secretary Christina Mandreucci. “Since all veteran records, documents and other materials are now scanned or transmitted electronically, Veterans Service Organizations and other accredited representatives have access to their clients’ records throughout the claims process in real time,” Mandreucci said. “This is a marked improvement over the limited, 48-hour review period under the old system.”

- President Donald Trump promised the Department of Veterans Affairs would [extend veterans’ deadlines for disability benefits](#) and postpone any debt collections as the country grapples with the coronavirus pandemic. The extension is an effort to lessen the financial effects of the pandemic on veterans. The announcement came after Sens. Jerry Moran and Jon Tester urged Wilkie this week to waive veterans’ filing deadlines that – if not met – could result in loss of VA benefits. Moran and Tester asked Wilkie to delay all deadlines by 180 days. It was uncertain how long the VA might extend the filings.

- The Department of Veterans Affairs is readying [1,500 hospital beds for non-veterans infected with the coronavirus](#) — the biggest step the agency has taken during the pandemic to serve as America’s backup medical system. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie announced Sunday night that the VA would treat civilian patients in Louisiana, Michigan and Massachusetts, in addition to the help it’s providing for non-veterans in New York and New Jersey. The VA is treating about 100 non-veterans in Brooklyn, Manhattan and East Orange, N.J., Wilkie said. The agency will begin to provide support in other hard-hit areas.

#### AMVETS in the News

##### [AMVETS and TruGenomix Partner to Tackle Rise in Women Veterans Suicides](#)

AMVETS (American Veterans) and TruGenomix, a veteran-owned precision behavioral health company is the first company to offer a clinical decision support tool to help identify those living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in military veterans and first responders, have announced a strategic partnership that will focus specifically on female veterans. Women, as well as other minority groups, have been largely underrepresented in leading studies. “We hope that by providing women veterans with the opportunity to understand how their genes were affected by trauma exposure, it will create treatment protocols that are more precise and individualized to the needs of these women,” said Cherissa Jackson, AMVETS Chief Medical Executive.

#### Upcoming Events

How to Struggle Well During COVID-19  
with Ken Falke and Josh Goldberg

Tuesday, April 7 11:00 AM

[Register here](#)

Rolling to Remember Update

Tuesday, April 7 7:00 PM

[Facebook Live](#)

AMVETS Legislative Priorities

[H.R. 1715](#) Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

[H.R. 1997](#) Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH

[S. 1906](#) Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR

[S. 785](#) Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019 introduced by Sen. Jon Tester of MT

[H.R. 4154](#) Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve Watkins of KS

[H.R. 3025](#) You Are Not Forgotten Act introduced by Rep. Mark Meadows of NC and Rep. Susie Lee of NV

Continued News

- The Air Force Academy has moved graduation up by more than a month to mid-April as it continues to fight the coronavirus and grapples with the [suspected suicides of two Air Force Academy seniors](#), the superintendent of the academy said in a message to cadets. The decision to move graduation forward was taken after two cadets were found dead in their rooms last week in what investigators believe were suicides.

- [Opinion](#): The invisible enemy that stalks us — firearm suicides — and how you can fight it



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