

S. 1436

Critical Health Access Resource and Grant Extensions (CHARGE) Act of 2023

SVAC Chairman Jon Tester and Senator Lisa Murkowski

Endorsements: Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, National Alliance to End Homelessness, Wounded Warrior Project, National Association of State Veterans Homes, Paralyzed Veterans of America

BACKGROUND: This legislation would extend successful, essential veterans' programs and authorities from the last few years that expired on May 11. The bill includes provisions related to homelessness, caregivers, and State Veterans Homes.

Title I – Homelessness

Section 101. Per Diem Payments. Increases the maximum VA reimbursement rate for transitional housing facilities which house homeless veterans from 115% to 200% of the standard rate (the state domiciliary rate). This will be in effect for three years, during which time VA is required to submit a report to Congress with a long-term strategy for the program, including a better measure for reimbursement than the current state domiciliary rate system.

Section 102. Improved Flexibility in Homeless Veteran Assistance. Extends for three years a recent authority provided to VA allowing the Department to provide direct support to homeless veterans when other resources through homeless program office grantees are not an option. This includes personal items like clothing, personal protective equipment (PPE), and hygiene items; food; landlord incentives to accept homeless veterans into permanent housing; transportation to health care and caseworker appointments; and more.

Section 103. Telehealth Services for Homeless Veterans. Makes permanent an authority to ensure access to wraparound services, like case management, to homeless veterans through telehealth.

Title II – Caregivers

Section 201. Extension of Virtual Visits. Allows veterans and caregivers to elect for a virtual home visit through September 30, 2023, or until VA finalizes their new regulations for the Caregivers program. Without this extension, the virtual home visit option was eliminated May 11, 2023.

Title III – State Veterans Homes

Section 301. State home defined. Definition of State Veterans Home for use in this title.

Section 302. “Bed Hold” Waiver. Maintains the occupancy rate requirement waiver until September 30, 2024 to allow State Veterans Homes to still receive per diem payment for a veteran's bed space for the first 10 days when a veteran is in the hospital. Normally, State Veterans Homes must have a daily occupancy rate of 90% or greater to qualify for this “bed hold” payment. As of March 2023, 90.3% (140 of 155) of State Veterans Homes do not meet the 90% occupancy rate due to staffing shortages. Without this extension, state homes are now financially penalized for workforce shortages when veteran residents are in the hospital.

Section 303. PPE and Supplies Sharing. Makes permanent an authority that allows VA to share PPE, vaccines, medicines, medical supplies, and other equipment and assistance with State Veterans Homes.