



# Washington Update

Check out the [PVAction Force](#) page to view alerts and a list of key legislation.

## WHITE HOUSE HOLDS MEETING ON ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

On July 11, Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley joined Vice President Kamala Harris and Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Pete Buttigieg, along with fellow disability rights leaders, for an event at the White House. The purpose of the event was to mark the 33rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and discuss recent efforts to improve accessibility across the nation's transportation system. The Secretary highlighted recent steps DOT has taken to improve access for people with disabilities in transit, air travel, and other transportation modes.

Ms. Ansley was one of five disability rights leaders selected to present to the Vice President and the Secretary during the event roundtable. She used the opportunity to discuss the lack of accessibility in air travel for passengers with disabilities. In her statement, she noted that passengers will continue to be injured, and wheelchairs mishandled until travelers can remain in their device. In the meantime, however, she called for improvements in training for workers who physically transfer passengers with disabilities and handlers who are responsible for wheelchair stowage. She also spoke of the need for not only stronger enforcement of the law but also amending it to require referral of certain passenger-filed complaints to the Attorney General and establishment of a private right of action.

A video of the convening's opening statements is available [here](#).

## HOUSE PASSES NDAA

On July 14, the House passed its version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2024 (H.R. 2670). More than 1,500 amendments were proposed to the annual defense policy bill. Some of those amendments included increasing the mileage reimbursement rate available to beneficiaries for travel to or from VA facilities; allowing veterans with combat-related disabilities and less than 20 years to have concurrent receipt of VA and Department of Defense benefits; raising the amount of VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation; and restructuring VA's Home Improvements and Structural Alterations grant program. The HISA amendment was offered at the request of PVA. Unfortunately, these amendments were not included in those considered by the House.

The Senate is also working on its own version of the bill. The Senate Armed Services Committee filed its legislation on July 11. PVA is supporting attempts to amend that bill in similar fashion. We will continue to monitor the NDAA in the House and Senate for inclusion of any amendments relevant to PVA members.



## VA FAMILY CAREGIVER PROGRAM UPDATE

On June 30, VA's Caregiver Support Program held a meeting with stakeholders, including PVA, to provide program updates. Last year, VA convened an Integrated Project Team (IPT) to consider recommendations to reform eligibility for VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. The IPT has concluded meetings and has agreed to support certain changes to the program.

The recommendations will need to be adopted through regulation. PVA is pleased that one of the proposed changes should amend eligibility criteria to increase access to the program. We look forward to reviewing the proposed rule and will provide comments to the VA.

## FEDERAL LAWSUIT ALLEGES ADA VIOLATIONS FOR VOTING IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

The United States Attorney's Office recently filed a lawsuit alleging the county has failed to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) following a lengthy investigation about disability-based discrimination in Los Angeles County at vote centers during recent elections. The investigation found that the county excluded qualified individuals with mobility and vision disabilities from participating in the county's voting programs. The complaint filed in United States District Court seeks a court order directing the county to comply with the ADA, promptly develop a plan to completely remedy the alleged violations, and not further discriminate against individuals with disabilities.

The investigation focused on physical accessibility for persons with disabilities at the county vote centers during the 2020 primary election, the 2020 general election and the 2022 general election. The United States Attorney's Office also reviewed other aspects of the county's voting programs, including curbside voting and ballot drop boxes. The lawsuit is part of the Justice Department's ADA Voting Initiative, which seeks to increase accessibility for voters with disabilities across the country.

## DOJ SETTLES CASE WITH SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO ON ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC SIDEWALK SYSTEMS

On June 23, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a [proposed settlement agreement](#) with San Juan, Puerto Rico, that would require the city to take critical steps towards making their public sidewalks accessible for pedestrians with disabilities. In the case of [Betancourt-Colon et al v. City of San Juan](#), individuals with mobility disabilities sued the city, alleging San Juan violated Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, by failing to install and maintain accessible sidewalks and curb ramps. The DOJ later [intervened](#).

The [proposed stipulated order](#) requires San Juan to train all city employees who supervise construction, repair, or maintenance related to public sidewalks on federal accessibility standards. In addition, San Juan must develop, implement, and report a process for soliciting and receiving input from people with disabilities regarding accessibility and conduct a self-assessment that accurately identifies any sidewalk barriers. A hired consultant will provide recommendations to remedy any sidewalk barriers that provide access to government offices and facilities, transportation terminals, places of public accommodations, and work places. In addition, San Juan must ensure any construction or alterations of public sidewalks will be compliant with ADA standards.

The U.S. Access Board, a federal agency that develops accessibility guidelines and standards, is expected to issue a final rule on [public rights-of-way](#) in the near future. The rule will address sidewalks, curb ramps, and other components of public rights-of-way. However, these standards will not be enforceable until adopted by DOJ and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF REFORMS TO VA'S CLOTHING ALLOWANCE

On December 29, 2022, Congress enacted the Cleland-Dole Veterans Benefits and Healthcare Improvement Act of 2022. PVA-supported section 201 provided for improvements to the claims process for VA Clothing Allowance. Specifically, the law requires VA to make recurring payments for a clothing allowance to



qualifying veterans until the veteran elects to no longer receive such payments or until VA determines the veteran is no longer eligible.

Veterans no longer have to submit an application by August 1 of the benefit year to receive payment for the benefit year. Instead, veterans will have until the end of the fiscal year (September 30) to submit their application for that benefit year. Veterans who received a clothing allowance payment in 2022 will receive the same number of clothing allowances in 2023, without having to submit an application this year or in subsequent years. Their clothing allowance payment will become an annual continuous / recurring payment.

First time applicants, applicants who previously received the benefit but did not apply for the 2022 benefit year, or applicants who received payment in 2022 but want additional clothing allowances will have until the end of the fiscal year to submit their application for the 2023 benefit. If approved, their clothing allowance payment will also become an annual continuous / recurring payment.

VA is finalizing an updated letter to send to veterans who received the clothing allowance in 2022 regarding the updated application requirements. In the meantime, please contact your PVA national service officer with any questions.

## NEWS OF NOTE

### DOL VETS Grant Awards

The Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL VETS) announced in early July over \$53 million in Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) grants to more than 150 recipients that will provide employment services to more than 20,000 homeless veterans looking to reintegrate into the workforce. More than \$25 million will be awarded to first-time recipients.

Grants were awarded to various state and local workforce investment boards, local public agencies and nonprofit organizations, tribal governments, faith-based

and community organizations. The grantees offer services and support to homeless and housing insecure veterans, such as occupational skills, apprenticeships, on the job training, and provide job placement assistance.

You can review the grantees [here](#).

### Accessible Transient Lodging Webinar Now Available

The U.S. Access Board's recent [webinar on accessible transient lodging](#) is now available. This webinar addressed accessibility requirements for hotels, motels, and other types of transient lodging facilities. Presenters reviewed requirements in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act Standards for dispersion of compliant guest rooms and suites with mobility and communication features, guest accommodations, such as sleeping areas, bathrooms, kitchens and kitchenettes, storage, signage, fire alarms, and phones, and other common amenities, such as check-in counters, fitness centers, swimming pools and spas, bars and restaurants, and conference rooms. The webinar series is hosted by the ADA National Network in cooperation with the Board.

## ADVOCACY AND COMMITTEE ACTION

### Disability Accessibility and Discrimination Issues at U.S. Ports of Entry Stories

Have you ever experienced disability accessibility or disability discrimination issues at U.S. ports of entry? PVA is collecting stories on members' accessibility issues or disability discrimination at [U.S. ports of entry](#) by air, land, or sea. This includes any passport kiosks or other technology, forms, passport control processes, inspections, or disability discrimination by Border Patrol agents. If you have encountered any accessibility difficulties or disability discrimination by [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#), please email PVA Advocacy Attorney, Danica Gonzalves, at [DanicaG@PVA.org](mailto:DanicaG@PVA.org).

### PVAction Force – Spread the Word!

PVA's grassroots advocacy team had the honor of attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in

**PVA.org**

**@ParalyzedVeterans**



**Paralyzed Veterans of America**



**@PVA1946**



**@PVA1946**



Portland, Oregon, the beginning of July, where they spread the word about PVAAction Force.

Staff met athletes, families, volunteers, and VA staff to spread the word about PVA policy priorities and get more people involved. PVAAction Force is for everyone to get in involved, including family, friends, and the community.

Please contact Lisa Elijah, PVA's Grassroots Advocacy Manager, at [LisaE@PVA.org](mailto:LisaE@PVA.org) for more information.

### **Upcoming Veterans' Committee Activities**

Please visit the [House](#) and [Senate](#) Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on upcoming hearings and markups.