

Wounded Warrior Project's Legislative Priorities and Why Congress Needs to Act

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Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) employs a variety of tools to advocate for warriors before Congress. Through our efforts to directly engage Member offices and create opportunities for warriors around the country to do the same, WWP is a trusted and reliable source of information about the problems – and solutions – that underscore legislation before Congress.

WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington took the first step by establishing our top priorities in [testimony before a joint session of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs](#) on March 4, 2021.

- [Women veterans](#) – Improve accessibility and availability of women's health care; enable stronger networks of professional and social support for women veterans during transition; help improve coordination across agencies to improve quality of care for military sexual trauma (MST) survivors.
- [Toxic exposures](#) – Prioritize the extension of health care; adopt presumptive service connection criteria; improve training and awareness among VA health providers.
- [Mental health](#) – Implement the *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act*Section 201; improve the quality and coordination of care for co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders; drive broader mental health reforms across American health systems.
- [Brain health](#) – Improve the continuity of care through effective case coordination services; provide more care and resources for those living with traumatic brain injuries; raise awareness of support systems currently available; prepare for long-term care needs of the post-9/11 generation.
- [Caregivers](#) – Expand VA mental health care to caregivers; remove barriers and increase funding for respite programs; protect severely wounded veterans' eligibility for services.
- [Compensation reform](#) – Create efficiency in VA's clothing benefit allowance; modernize VA's approach to static disability ratings; allow for concurrent receipt of VA and DoD benefits by medically retired veterans.

Over the weeks that followed, WWP continued a steady cadence of front-line advocacy on the issues closest to our mission.

On March 11, WWP Government Affairs Specialist Aleks Morosky testified before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on the [lasting effects toxic exposures have on veterans](#) and called on Congress to:

- Prioritize the extension of health care.
- Adopt a framework to establish presumptive disabilities for all toxic exposures.
- Improve direct service connection for toxic exposures.

Since then, multiple pieces of toxic exposure legislation have been introduced to include [S. 927](#) and [H.R. 2127](#), the *Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act*, which, if signed into law, will expand health care eligibility and create a framework for establishing presumptive service connection for all military toxic exposures, now and in the future. **The TEAM Act has been a signature piece of legislation championed by WWP since being first introduced in 2020**

Just over a week later, on March 19, WWP Chief Program Officer Jennifer Silva [testified on WWP's longstanding support of women warriors](#) and our recommendations to Congress to better serve women veterans. Silva highlighted WWP's support of key legislation and identified specific reforms needed to enhance the lives of women warriors, including:

- Expanding access to health care for women veterans
- Improving mental health and peer support opportunities for women transitioning out of service
- Ensuring compassionate, comprehensive care for MST survivors

Subsequently, Silva represented WWP in a closed-door roundtable discussion before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (HVAC) titled "The Role of VSOs in Eliminating Sexual Harassment at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)." The discussion focused on how Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), partnering with VA, can help eliminate sexual harassment and sexual assault at the VA as well as the implementation of Section 5303 of the *Deborah Sampson Act*.

The forward-leaning conversation continued, and **WWP once again testified on April 15. Government Affairs Director Brian Dempsey testified before HVAC, Subcommittee on Health, on pending health care legislation.**

Key topics in this discussion included [women veterans, mental health, and resources for veterans living in rural areas](#). Dempsey voiced WWP support for several pieces of legislation, including [H.R. 344](#), the Women Veterans TRUST Act; [H.R. 958](#), the Protecting Moms Who Served Act; and [H.R. 2441](#), the Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021.

- The *Women Veterans TRUST Act* will provide long-term, residential, women-specific drug and alcohol dependency treatment and rehabilitation programs for women veterans.
- The *Protecting Moms Who Served Act* will help women veterans by studying the unique maternal health risks facing pregnant and postpartum veterans and by supporting maternity care coordination programs at VA facilities.
- The *Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act* will expand mental health care access and research for veterans in rural areas.

Toxic exposure also continued to be a significant source of congressional interest. WWP was humbled to provide expert opinion on legislation during a pair of hearings intended to advance bills to the voting stage. In testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs (April 28) and HVAC (May 5), Morosky outlined support and suggestions for improvement on several bills to complement WWP support for the *TEAM Act*, including:

- [**S. 952 / H.R. 2372**](#), the *Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act* which establishes presumptive service connection for more than 20 cancers and respiratory conditions experienced by Gulf War and post-9/11 veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.
- [**S. 437 / H.R. 2436**](#), the *Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act*, which concedes exposure to burn pits or other toxic substances to ease the evidentiary burden on deployed Gulf War and post-9/11 veterans when filing claims for direct service connection.

While many of our programs and services are designed to meet the needs of the post-9/11 generation, our advocacy before Congress allows us to drive critical changes that will benefit veterans of all eras. We have been fortunate to see many of our top priorities become law. Other key initiatives have gained considerable momentum over the years. And while the momentum is undeniable, advocacy cannot stop with testimony, or a carefully planned legislative agenda. Our elected officials and veterans must [**take action**](#) to improve veteran lives. Our legislative priorities are formed through engagements with the warriors we serve, and through the thousands of responses we receive through the WWP Annual Warrior Survey. The data collected by this survey is analyzed and evaluated to give policymakers data and personal insights into veterans' greatest needs.

WWP will continue to work with, and if needed, challenge, Members of the 117th Congress to make the necessary reforms and changes that will provide wounded veterans and their families with the resources, care, and treatment they need to thrive in their communities.

Read [**"Wounded Warrior Project Testifies Before Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees"**](#)

<https://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/Our-Priorities-and-Why-Congress-Needs-to-Act>