



Supporting America's Veterans, Service Members, Their Families, Caregivers, and Survivors

Special Focus on Antisemitism and Solidarity and Unity for Israel

JWV is in a unique position to have a special focus on antisemitism, expressing solidarity and unity for Israel. (See attached JWV led letter signed by 26 organizations expressing solidarity and unity for Israel).

JWV opposes all forms of discrimination and bigotry but is especially outspoken on antisemitism. During 2023, JWV leadership participated in numerous roundtables and called out individuals for hate speech and antisemitism. JWV will continue to be a strong voice to combat antisemitism wherever and whenever it occurs. As the only Jewish VSO, we previously issued statements condemning antisemitic events and speeches. As instances of antisemitism across the country increase, especially following the terrorist attacks of October 7, JWV remains dedicated to condemning hate speech. JWV is partnering with organizations like Stand Up Against Jewish Hate, #BlueSquare, Combating Antisemitism Movement and StandWithUs to address antisemitism at colleges and universities as well as in communities across the nation.

Descriptions of instances and JWV updates are highlighted in the two-page summary of our efforts. JWV asks all Americans to be vigilant, learn, and educate our fellow citizens.

JWV asks Members of Congress to join us in combating antisemitism targeted at veterans and military service members. JWV stands ready to be a resource for you and your staffs in helping to educate Americans. We feel that education is the key to reducing antisemitic actions and incidents in America and around the world.

Overview

JWV works to support veterans and service members, and believes that obligation extends to their families, including caregivers and survivors. JWV is and continues to be at the forefront as a voice for not only those of the Jewish faith but for **all veterans**. As we look to the second session of 118th Congress, JWV will continue to advocate for all those who are wearing or have worn the uniform of the United States. Our priorities are listed below.

Delivering Timely, High-quality Benefits and Services

In 2023, VA processed a record 1.98 million veteran claims. **JWV will continue to hold VA accountable and urge them to continue to be innovative and timely in serving additional veterans.** JWV will continue to engage with Veterans Benefits Administration and Board of Veterans Appeals officials to improve processes.

Addressing Toxic Exposures and Burn Pits (PACT Act)

JWV, like many VSOs, made the PACT Act a top priority. While the legislation was life-changing for so many veterans more needs to be done. JWV commends VA for screening more than 5 million veterans for toxic exposure and completing claims in approximately 160 days. **Congress must continue to provide the resources, including hiring individuals to adjudicate claims and funding upgrades to Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) IT systems, and ensure Veterans Health Administration officials have the clinical resources, equipment, and space to treat these veterans.** JWV remains committed to holding VA accountable in implementing the provisions of the PACT Act.

Suicide Prevention and Mental Health -- Reducing Veteran Suicide

Mental health and suicide prevention remain a top priority for JWV as the suicide rate among veterans is nearly double when compared to civilians with women vets more than double that of female



civilians. Veterans and service members must have increased access to mental health services as well as availability to alternative and community-based treatments. **JWV urges Congress to fully fund VA's suicide prevention and mental health budget, including extending free emergency health care for those in crisis.** The transition from active military to civilian is difficult and the time when individuals are often at higher risk. Education and awareness is paramount and must be integral to any prevention plan. In addition, the suicide rate for active duty service members is at an all-time high, with the U.S. Marine Corps having the highest rate of all branches in 2022.

Fixing VA's Electronic Health Record System

JWV remains concerned that VA continues to experience issues with deploying its electronic health record system. The combination of cost overruns and lack of proper training for clinicians and staff jeopardizes patients' safety. Patients' safety must be paramount, and VA must improve training for its staff and hold Oracle accountable for the system's failures. JWV insists VA learn from and take corrective actions to prevent system failures as deployments are set to resume in 2024. **JWV urges Congress to hold VA accountable and ensure patient safety is maintained during any future deployments.**

Major Richard Star Act

JWV supports legislation for the immediate payment of concurrent receipt of full military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation for disabled retirees. Specifically, JWV is seeking the enactment of the Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282/S. 344) that authorizes concurrent receipt of retired pay and VA disability compensation, to include Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) beneficiaries who are medically retired with less than 20 years of service (Chapter 61). This legislation has strong support, with 327 cosponsors in the House and 72 cosponsors in the Senate. Reduced retirement pay for those injured in combat and forced to medically retire communicates an awful message to those in our all-volunteer force. ***Please include Star Act language in the FY25 NDAA base text.***

Supporting Women and Underserved Veterans

According to VA, women are the fastest growing group of veterans who use VA services. JWV is committed to addressing the specialized health care needs of women veterans including increasing cancer screenings, improving mental health care and access, addressing infertility, and reducing intimate partner violence. JWV supports the provisions of the Deborah Sampson Act and remains committed to improving maternal health, and placing a Women's Mental Health Champion Coordinator at every VA Medical Center to ensure women feel welcome and receive equitable treatment and care.

National Museum of American Jewish Military History (NMAJMH)

Do you know about our museum located in our Headquarters' Building? JWV's leadership recognized the need to bring the stories of Jewish servicemen and women to the public because if Jews do not tell our stories, nor share our message, who will? To that end, the National Museum of American Jewish Military History (located near Dupont Circle) was chartered in 1958. The museum is dedicated to recognizing, preserving, and commemorating the service, heroism, and sacrifices of Jewish men and women who have fought in war and contributed to the peace and freedom of America. We urge you to tour the museum on your next visit to Washington, DC. I am sure you will be surprised to learn about the long and extensive U.S. military history of members of the Jewish faith.

Conclusion

JWV has a long history in advocating for a strong national defense and fair recognition and compensation for veterans, service members and their families. We are proud to share and work with Members of Congress and our colleagues at other VSOs. There is strength in numbers and working together we can continue to assure that all veterans receive the benefits earned and deserved.

For more information on these priorities contact National Executive Director Ken Greenberg (kgreenberg@jwv.org), Outreach Coordinators Bryn Garick (bgarick@jwv.org) or Brenna Van Stone (bvanstone@jwv.org), phone (202) 265-6280, www.jwv.org