

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Pilar Schiavo, Chair

HR 120 (Alanis) – As Introduced June 10, 2026

SUBJECT: Veterans.

SUMMARY: Recognizes the service of and the honor bestowed on veterans by the United States of America (U.S.) and by California. Resolves that the California State Assembly honors the service and sacrifice of all U.S. veterans. Urges Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to enhance efforts in reducing the backlog and processing times for veterans' disability claims by improving staffing, administrative efficiency, and modernizing claims systems. Resolves that the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the U.S. President, VA Secretary, each member of the California Congressional delegation, and to the author. Specifically, **this resolution**: makes the following legislative findings:

- 1) The U.S. and California recognize the dedication of Armed Forces veterans.
- 2) California has one of the largest veteran populations, contributing significantly to civic, economic, and cultural life.
- 3) Veterans often depend on disability compensation from the VA for essential needs.
- 4) Timely access to these benefits is crucial for honoring veterans and ensuring their stability.
- 5) Delays in processing disability claims can cause financial hardship and emotional stress for veterans and their families.
- 6) Recent data indicate that average claim processing times have exceeded several months, leading to a backlog.
- 7) Efforts to enhance processing efficiency, including modernization and increased staffing, have shown potential for reducing delays.
- 8) Prioritizing expedited claims processing reflects a commitment to veterans and ensures timely access to benefits.
- 9) California is dedicated to honoring its veterans through recognition and advocacy for efficient claims processing.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Authorizes the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) to:
 - a) Assist U.S. military veterans and their dependents or survivors with claims against the United States arising from military service;
 - b) Aid in establishing rights to privileges, preferences, care, or compensation as provided by federal or state laws; and,
 - c) Cooperation and contract with accredited veterans service organizations to implement these services. (Military and Veterans Code § 699.5)
- 2) Requires the VA to make a reasonable effort to assist veterans and their dependents or survivors gather the evidence necessary to substantiate their claims for VA benefits, referred to as the "duty to assist." (38 U.S. Code § 5103A)

FISCAL EFFECT: None.

COMMENTS:

1) PURPOSE OF THIS BILL. According to the author, “California is home to one of the largest veteran populations in the country, and we have a responsibility to advocate for those who have served. As a result of staffing shortages and administrative inefficiencies, many veterans wait months or even years to receive benefits after returning home. HR 120 reaffirms California’s commitment to honoring our veterans by urging continued efforts to reduce delays in the federal disability claims process. For many veterans and their families, disability benefits provide stability and access to basic needs like health care and housing. This resolution encourages accountability and more efficient use of resources to ensure veterans are able to access their earned benefits.”

2) BACKGROUND.

a) Disability Claims through the VA. Filing for VA benefits involves a complex, highly technical process. The Code of Federal Regulations, Title 38, which governs veterans’ claims, contains more than 1,600 pages of fine print, and the accompanying manual is also over 1,600 pages in length. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), a component of the VA, processes disability claims and administers all aspects of the VA disability program. VA disability compensation is paid to honorably discharged veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. Veterans may apply in person, by mail, or electronically through the VA eBenefits portal. Disability claims require an analysis and review by the VBA and typically take between 90 and 120 days to receive a decision.

The VA claims process is arduous, cumbersome, extensive, stressful, and time-consuming. The VA’s eBenefits portal provides veterans with information and resources regarding the claims process, allowing them to securely submit disability claims, including those for increased benefits, supplemental claims, and secondary service-connected claims. Veterans can upload documents in support of their claim and check the status of their application. The application process requires veterans to submit sensitive personal information, including protected health information.

The VA is well known for its historically large numbers of backlogged claims. The VA defines a backlog as disability benefits cases, claims, and appeals that the VA still needs to process and has been pending for over 125 days. According to the latest VBA Report, as of June 13, 2026, the backlog of rating-related claims is 70,104 out of a total claims inventory of 586,502. Once the VA makes a benefits decision on a claim, it is no longer in the claims inventory. If a veteran appeals a benefits decision, the appealed claim is tracked separately.

b) Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). DOGE focused its efforts on the VA, particularly the VBA, leading to significant controversy and disruption of services. An AI tool to evaluate and “munch” VA contracts, often inflating their value and erroneously targeting critical services implemented by DOGE resulted in inflated contract values and misdirected attention towards essential services. Additionally, DOGE’s push for stringent telework policies prompted internal changes at VBA, which continues to face congressional scrutiny aimed at alleviating bureaucratic impediments. A report by Senator Richard Blumenthal highlights the detrimental effects of the Trump

Administration's policies on VA operations. It shows notable staffing losses, prolonged wait times, and the overall decline in morale among remaining employees. The report indicates that VBA has seen over 4,500 employees leave, causing further delays, increased wait times on legacy claims decisions, and the number of veterans asking VA to take a second look at their claim increased by 44% because of errors claims processors made. These employees have been forced to prioritize quantity over quality to meet new, higher production quotas with fewer staff. Ultimately, veterans are bearing the consequences of these administrative shortcomings, alongside a demoralized workforce struggling to cope with reduced staffing and heightened demands.

- c) **The Honoring Our PACT Act of 2022.** The PACT Act, also known as the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, expands VA health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances like burn pits and Agent Orange, and provides retroactive pay for certain conditions. To meet the demand of newly eligible PACT Act claims, the VA gradually increased its workforce by 61,000 in 2024.
- d) **County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs).** Both the VA and the State of California offer resources and services to help veterans navigate the claims process. To assist veterans and their families in navigating the claims process, 29 states, including California, utilize the CVSO model, while six states employ a state service officer model. CVSOs are trained, accredited professionals who can legally represent veterans in the federal claims process and help connect veterans with state- and locally provided benefits. Fifty-six of California's 58 counties have CVSOs. The services provided by CVSOs are offered free of charge to veterans and their families. CalVet and CVSOs are partners in California, with CVSOs serving as the front-line support for veterans and their families, while CalVet assists with claims development, representation, and appeals. CVSOs are a critical component in the state's efforts to work directly with individual veterans and their families, ensuring that our veterans receive the benefits they have earned through their service to our nation. According to the California Association of CVSOs, California accounts for approximately 12% of all VA disability claims submitted to the VA, even though California is home to about 8% of the U.S. veteran population. CVSOs use VetPro software program, a VA credentialing software system, to enhance their claims reporting and tracking. California has an incredibly robust network of over 1,500 physical locations and thousands of VA-accredited professionals including organizations such as the VFW, American Legion, DAV, and others available to help veterans navigate and file for VA benefits in California.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file.

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Patty Patten / M. & V.A. / (916) 319-3550