July 1, 2019

VETERANS
MONTHLY INFORMATION PACKAGE

FLAGLER COUNTY

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Feel free to make copies and distribute throughout your organization.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 25, 2019

VA’s Veterans Crisis Line setting gold standard in call-response rate

Center surpasses prior year’s record, increasing access to more Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ recent release of the 2018 data for the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) confirms the call center continues to outpace last year’s metrics by providing faster, more effective assistance to Veterans and their loved ones.

VCL’s fiscal year 2018 performance metrics show that since 2017, the number of calls routed to contingency crisis call centers decreased from 44,263 to 1,056, and the average speed to answer calls decreased from 8.44 seconds to 7.23 seconds.

“The VCL is there for you if you are in crisis, or if you know someone who you think may be going through a difficult time,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “VCL provides quick access to trained, caring and qualified responders able to help service members and Veterans through a crisis and link them to local VA suicide prevention coordinators for more support.”

VCL connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with highly trained VA responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat or text. It is now the largest crisis call center in the world and a recognized leader in call-center intervention services. VCL currently answers nearly one-third of all calls placed to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which last year received over 2 million calls.

Since its inception in 2007, VCL responders have answered more than 3.9 million calls, conducted more than 467,000 online chats and responded to more than 123,000 texts. Their efforts have resulted in the dispatch of emergency services nearly 119,000 times to Veterans in need.

For more information on VCL, visit www.veteranscrisisline.net. Learn more about VA’s suicide prevention resources and programs at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention.

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call VCL for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, send a text message to 838255, or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

Reporters covering this issue should visit www.reportingonsuicide.org for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 17, 2019

New research affirms critical need for caregivers in Veteran care

WASHINGTON — New research published in the June 2019 edition of the journal Health Affairs shows the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Elizabeth Dole Foundation are working collectively to better integrate caregivers into a Veteran’s health care treatment.

The report, titled "Including Family Caregivers in Seriously Ill Veterans' Care: A Mixed-Methods Study," was led by Duke University researchers and emphasizes caregiver inclusion identified in the VA - Elizabeth Dole Foundation’s Campaign for Inclusive Care, which strengthens health care and is a model for improving care in the private sector. The Campaign for Inclusive Care is one of several initiatives and programs through which VA supports Veterans’ caregivers.

“VA is pleased to partner with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, whose commitment to caregiver support mirrors our own,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilke. “The Campaign for Inclusive Care is a groundbreaking model integrating Veteran caregivers into the fabric of our organization, ensuring Veterans’ health care needs are met.”

The study supports using family caregivers for Veteran care and provides recommendations, to include: a call to better define caregiver roles, support for caregiver inclusion in health teams and streamlining legal and privacy regulations currently creating barriers to provider-caregiver information sharing. The study also suggests health care teams (generally comprising a physician, nurse and social worker) build strong relationships with caregivers by inviting their participation in care decisions and creating methods to assess their abilities and assist their needs.

“These findings support the essential idea of a care model that is fully inclusive of Veteran caregivers,” said Sen. Elizabeth Dole, founder of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. “We are grateful to work with VA, ensuring caregivers are empowered and providers are better supported in their work to improve Veteran care.”

The Campaign for Inclusive Care builds on findings of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation's 2014 RAND Report, indicating a wounded warrior’s best chance for full recovery is a strong, well-supported caregiver.

Learn more by visiting the Campaign for Inclusive Care website. For additional information, contact Dan Gregory for the Elizabeth Dole Foundation at dgregory@susandavis.com or call 215-285-4137 or email VA Office of Public Affairs at vapublicaffairs@va.gov.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 25, 2019

VA to reduce rates for Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance

On July 1, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will reduce Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance (SGLI) monthly premium rates from 7 cents per $1,000 to 6 cents per $1,000 of insurance, along with Family SGLI Program (FSGLI) premium rates for spousal coverage at all age brackets.

SGLI is a program that provides low-cost term life insurance coverage to eligible service members, while FSGLI provides group term life insurance coverage to the spouses and dependent children of service members insured under SGLI.

“VA continues to place the interests of service members and their families first by keeping SGLI premiums as low as possible, while ensuring funds are available to pay claims to beneficiaries,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This is just another example of VA’s efforts to provide improved services to Veterans.”

The SGLI premium decrease impacts 2.1 million active duty service members, Reservist and National Guard members, while the FSGLI premium decrease impacts nearly 1 million of those members who have coverage for their spouses.

This will mean a decrease of $4.00 a month in premiums for a service member with the maximum $400,000 of SGLI coverage. Service members with spouses covered under FSGLI will see an additional average monthly premium decrease ranging from 10 to 32% depending on the age and the amount of coverage for the spouse.

VA regularly reviews the claims experience and the financial position of the program and has reduced premiums whenever possible. Service members with SGLI and FSGLI coverage will begin seeing a change in the deduction from their pay during the month of July.

Reservists drilling (monthly unit training) for retirement points rather than pay or not receiving pay for other reasons, will be billed by their service department for the reduced premium rates beginning in July 2019.

For more information, visit www.benefits.va.gov/insurance for the tables of the new premium rates.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 27, 2019

VA-Verizon partnership offers unlimited access to department’s video telehealth service

WASHINGTON — As a result of a partnership with Verizon, Veterans who are customers of the telecommunications company, as of June 27, will have unlimited access to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs’ (VA) VA Video Connect telehealth app.

Veterans will be able to access VA Video Connect, which uses the cameras on computers, smartphones or tablets, to let Veterans talk and interact with their VA care team over a live, encrypted video stream, anywhere across Verizon’s nationwide 4G LTE network, without incurring data charges.

“VA’s telehealth app for streaming live video sessions between patients and health care providers is another testament to our shared journey to fully integrated, seamless access to health care for our Veterans, no matter where they live,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said.

Accessing VA Video Connect is easy: For iOS devices, VA Video Connect is available at the Apple App Store; for all other devices, a telehealth session launches automatically after a Veteran user selects an emailed session.

“We’re proud to deepen our support of Veterans,” said Mike Maiorana, senior vice president, Public Sector, Verizon. “Regardless of whether they live in city centers or rural areas, Veterans should be able to access the VA’s telehealth resources.”

###
Federal legislation could change American Legion membership

Written By: Bonnie Meibers | Jun 16th 2019 - 12am.

North Dakota Sen. John Hoeven co-sponsored legislation that would amend the American Legion’s charter to allow those whose service was in unrecognized times of war since World War II to join the Legion.

Currently, only veterans who fought in World War I, World War II, Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Lebanon/Grenada conflict, the U.S. invasion of Panama or the Gulf War can become members of the Legion. Anyone who served in the days, months or years in between is not eligible. This federal legislation would change that.

Terry Buraas, adjutant, or secretary and treasurer, at the American Legion Post 157 in East Grand Forks, said veterans have been fighting for similar legislation since the Korean War ended.

“It’s about time,” Buraas said. “There have been many resolutions to get it done.”

The Vietnam Army veteran said he’s had to turn veterans with battle stars away because their dates of service don’t match up with the Legion’s eligibility requirements.

“This is fantastic,” said Rick Bartlette, manager of the American Legion. “I think this is wonderful.”

The Let Everyone Get Involved in Opportunities for National Service Act, or LEGION Act, was introduced Feb. 14 in the U.S. Senate and passed on June 13. It still needs approval from the U.S. House of Representatives in order to become law.

“The value of a veteran’s service to our nation doesn’t diminish due to the date on which they served,” Hoeven said in a news release issued by his office.

Because Legion membership periods are congressionally chartered, the organization can’t expand membership eligibility without an act of Congress.

“Our legislation makes an important change to the American Legion’s charter to ensure we properly honor all of our veterans, whether or not the conflict they faced was in an official period of war,” Hoeven said.

Buraas said the change in law may not persuade some veterans, who have been trying to join the Legion but couldn’t because of their dates of service.
“Some guys might have just given up,” Buraas said. “But I think a few will come in and sign up if this gets passed.”
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1. Blue Water Navy Act Now Law: The president signed the VFW-championed Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 into law Tuesday evening. It now restores VA benefits to thousands of Vietnam veterans who had their disability eligibility taken away in 2002 after arbitrary regulatory changes. For Korean DMZ veterans, it provides an earlier start date to encompass the timeframe when various defoliants were tested — from April 1, 1968, to Sept. 1, 1967. The new law expands benefits to children born with spina bifida due to a parent’s exposure in Thailand, coverage that already exists for the children of Vietnam and Korean DMZ veterans, and it requires the VA to report on research being conducted on a broad range of conditions possibly related to service in Southwest Asia. “The VFW is proud to have helped lead the charge to return benefits to these deserving veterans and to expand existing benefits to dependent children,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. The VA has yet to update its webpages to reflect the new law, but veterans and their families can still learn more about VA benefits associated with Agent Orange exposure, and about spina bifida birth defects related to exposure. For assistance in filing claims, find an accredited VFW service officer.

2. Women Veterans Taskforce Roundtable: VFW Department of Maryland Quartermaster Denise Perry attended a Women Veterans Taskforce roundtable this week to discuss how the VFW and other veterans organizations learn from and advocate for women veterans. Members of Congress asked representatives from veterans organizations what they believe is needed to ensure women veterans have their voice represented in the fight to improve veteran benefits. Perry discussed the need to ensure servicewomen know about the benefits that come with joining veteran service organizations such as the VFW. She discussed how the VFW provided the comradery she needed after leaving military service and the work the VFW does to improve care and service for women veterans. Learn more about the VFW’s advocacy efforts for women veterans.

3. Senate Passes the NDAA for FY 2020: Yesterday, the Senate passed S.1790, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (NDAA) yesterday by an 86-8 vote. The bill provides $750 billion in total spending, a 3.1 percent pay raise for our 2.15 million uniformed
service members, and reforms to the Military Housing Privatization Initiative to improve quality of life for military families. Ninety-three bipartisan amendments were also adopted which included an amendment allowing the families of the 1983 Marine Barracks bombing victims to access $1.68 billion in Iranian funds currently held by Clearstream. Unfortunately, Sen. Doug Jones (D-Ala.) amendment to end the Widow’s Tax was blocked by Senate leadership yesterday morning. Read more.

4. Legislation to Give Student Veterans Break Pay Introduced: This week Senators Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Roberts (R-Kan.) introduced the VFW supported S. 1946, Student Veterans Housing Act which would extend housing payments for student veterans during certain breaks between semesters. This proposed change would allow student veterans to focus on their educational goals by reducing the burden of housing costs. The VFW thanks Senators Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Roberts (R-Kan.) for their bipartisan efforts to enhance the lives of student veterans. Read the Press Release.

5. Plans for Third North Korean Summit Underway: On Wednesday, South Korean President Moon Jae-in stated that the U.S. is in early negotiations with North Korea over a proposed third bilateral summit to take place later this year. Moon, who has been acting as a mediator between the two countries, further stated that the U.S. had made a proposal for working-level talks with North Korea shortly following the Hanoi summit in February, and that he has been urging the North to return to the negotiating table. U.S. Special Envoy to North Korea Stephen Biegun arrived in Seoul on Thursday in order to meet with South Korean officials ahead of a proposed stopover by President Trump as he travels to Osaka, Japan, for the 2019 G20 Summit.

6. VA to Reduce Rates for Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance: VA will be reducing the monthly premium for Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance (SGLI) starting July 1, 2019. The monthly premium rates will fall from 7 cents per $1,000 of insurance coverage to 6 cents per $1,000 of insurance coverage. This will mean a decrease of $4.00 per month for any service member who has elected the full $400,000 of SGLI coverage. Service members who have elected Family SGLI coverage will see a monthly premium decrease in the range of 10 percent to 32 percent; the age of their spouse and amount of coverage effects their premiums. Reservists who do not receive pay due to a number of reasons, will start to be billed at the new rates in July 2019. Learn more.

7. Update Your Information on the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry: Service members and veterans who have already signed up for the registry should make sure that their contact information, phone number, address, and email are up-to-date. If you have not already signed up for the registry and you have served in one of the eligible areas, please learn more about the registry.

8. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identifications of two American servicemen who had been missing and unaccounted for from WWII and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- Army Sgt. Vernon R. Judd was a member of Company D, 89th Medium Tank Battalion, 25th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950, when he was
captured by enemy forces in the vicinity of Ipsok, North Korea. According to reports, Judd died at Hofong Prison of War camp on Feb. 15, 1951. Interment services are pending. Read about Judd.

-- Army Air Forces Sgt. Howard F. Gotts was a radio operator assigned to the 66th Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bombardment Group. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24D aircraft on which Gotts served, crashed during the largest bombing mission against the oil fields and refineries at Ploiesti, north of Bucharest, Romania. The Romanian government announced they had recovered and buried 216 Americans killed in the bombing raid, but could only identify 27 of the men at the time of the recovery. The remaining casualties were said to have been buried as Unknowns in the Hero Section of the Civilian and Military Cemetery of Bolovan, Ploiesti, Prahova, Romania. Interment services are pending. Read about Gotts.

To sign up new veterans’ advocates, visit: http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm.

As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to vfwac@vfw.org.

To view this week’s and previous editions, visit: http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly.
Happy Birthday U.S. Army!

June 14, 2019

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1. Congress Passes VFW-Championed Blue Water Navy Legislation: On Wednesday, the Senate unanimously passed H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019. “We now urge the president to quickly sign the bill into law so that tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans can have their disability benefits restored, as well as an expansion of benefits to military dependents, veterans of the Korean DMZ, and those exposed to toxic hazards in Southwest Asia,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. The bill was previously passed by the House with a vote of 410-0. The VFW thanks veterans and advocates who contacted their members of Congress in support of this important bill. Stay tuned to the VFW Action Corps Weekly for updates as the bill is enacted into law and implemented. If you need help filing a VA claim for disability compensation, please contact a VFW Service Officer in your state.

2. House Advances Defense Authorization Bill: On Thursday, the House Committee on Armed Services approved H.R. 2500, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (NDAA) that authorizes $733 billion in defense spending, a 3.1 percent pay increase for all military personnel, and an end strength of 1.3 million for the Armed Forces – an increase of 6,215 for active-duty. The legislation includes a number of VFW-supported provisions that improve the quality of life for our service members and military families – $9.2 million for construction and improvement of military family housing, a $1,000 reimbursement increase for military spouse to obtain professional certifications and licenses after a PCS change, and authorizes financial assistance to civilian child care providers who care for the children of members who die in the line of duty. The VFW is pleased the legislation would also direct DOD to review the service records of World War I minority service members who were appropriately recognized for their valorous service, but denied the highest service medal because of racial bias.
3. **OIG Finds Veterans Overcharged on VA Home Loan Funding Fees**: The Office of the Inspector General released a report this month finding that VA charged exempt veterans approximately $286.4 million in funding fees from calendar years 2012 through 2017, which affected about 72,900 veterans. The $286.4 million is broken into “avoidable” charges, when the veteran was eligible at the time of the loan, and “unavoidable” charges, when the veteran became eligible after the origination of the loan, with the majority $220.6 million in “unavoidable” charges. Veterans who believe they were overcharged should contact VA Regional Offices with Loan Guaranty operations at 1.877.827.3702.

4. **VA to Make Health Care Facilities Smoke-Free**: Starting October 2019, VA will implement a new policy restricting smoking by patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors and vendors at its health care facilities. The smoke-free policy applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, any other combustion of tobacco and non-Federal Drug Administration approved electronic nicotine delivery systems, including but not limited to electronic or e-cigarettes. Learn more.

5. **Fallujah Veteran to Receive Medal of Honor**: The president will award the Medal of Honor on June 25 to a soldier who fought through a nest of insurgents during the second Battle of Fallujah in 2004, according to a Stars & Stripes article. Then-Staff Sgt. David G. Bellavia originally received the Silver Star for his actions, but his citation was revisited as part of a review of valor awards and determined worthy of the nation’s highest combat award. A squad leader at the time with 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Bellavia, now 43 with his own talk radio program in Buffalo, N.Y., was clearing a block of buildings when his platoon was pinned down on Nov. 10, 2004, in Fallujah, Iraq. The first nine buildings were found to be unoccupied, but not the 10th, according to his Silver Star citation. Bellavia becomes the seventh but first living Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran to receive the Medal of Honor; the other six medals were presented posthumously. Read the Stripes article.

6. **Posthumous DSC Awarded at VFW Post Named in Recipient’s Honor**: The Army last weekend awarded a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross to the family of Staff Sgt. Michael H. Ollis, who blocked a suicide bomber's blast with his own body to save a Polish Army officer in Afghanistan on Aug. 28, 2013. Ollis, who originally received a posthumous Silver Star for the action, was serving in Company B, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, when enemy forces attacked Forward Operating Base Ghazni with "vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, suicide vests, indirect fire, and small-arms fire," according to his Silver Star citation. Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville, confirmed to be the service’s next chief of staff, presented the second highest award for valor to Ollis' family members during a June 8 ceremony at VFW Post 9587 on Staten Island, which was renamed after the staff sergeant in 2014. The DSC is an upgrade to the Silver Star Ollis posthumously received in 2013. Read the Army release.

7. **Army Picks Alabama Native as Next SMA**: Secretary of the Army Dr. Mark T. Esper and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley announced Tuesday that Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Grinston will assume responsibilities as the 16th Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). He is expected to be sworn in Aug. 16, 2019, to succeed SMA Dan Dieley, who is retiring after
serving in the position since January 2015. According to an Army press release, Grinston, a native of Jasper, Ala., currently serves as the senior enlisted leader for U.S. Army Forces Command — the service’s largest command and provider of expeditionary land forces. He is a combat veteran who has served in every leadership position from team leader to division command sergeant major with two tours each to Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, as well as Desert Shield, Desert Storm and to Kosovo. Grinston also served as the senior enlisted leader for the Army’s first deployment of a division headquarters, with 1st Infantry Division, in support of Operation Inherent Resolve from October 2014 to June 2015. Among his numerous awards and decorations are five Bronze Star medals (two with combat ‘V’ devices), and the Combat Action Badge. Read more.

8. Saipan 75th Remembered Saturday: Visitors to Washington, D.C., this weekend are invited to help commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Saipan at the National World War II Memorial tomorrow at 11:30 a.m. The ceremony will include WWII veterans, family members, and representatives of the Mariana Islands and Military District of Washington. A wreath will be laid at the Memorial’s Pacific Arch in honor of the 71,000 Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines who liberated the island, and to remember the nearly 3,500 killed and more than 10,000 wounded. Read more.

9. Recruit Training Gender Integration: On Wednesday, the House Committee on Armed Services voted along party lines to fully integrate women into Marine Corps recruit training at Parris Island and Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. Introduced as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 by Rep. Jackie Speier, the language prohibits gender-segregated training at all Marine Corps recruit depots. Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, would have five years to become fully integrated; and Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego would have eight years. In order for this provision to become law, it must first be approved by the full House before moving onto the Senate, where it could face opposition and be removed.

10. Happy 244th birthday to the Army: Since June 14, 1775, United States soldiers have been defending the freedoms and way of life of our great country. The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. salutes the men and women who have sacrificed and defended our nation from the American Revolution through today’s War on Terrorism.

11. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identifications of three American servicemen who had been missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam and Korean Wars, and WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Air Force Col. Roy A. Knight, Jr.** was a pilot with the 602nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, assigned to Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. On May 19, 1967, Knight’s aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire, severing the right wing. No parachute was observed prior to the aircraft crashing and bursting into flames. The Air Force declared Knight deceased in September 1974. Interment services are pending. Read about Knight.

-- **Army Cpl. Robert L. Bray** was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Regiment. He was reported missing in action on July 20, 1950, when he
could not be accounted for following his unit fighting in a defensive action against enemy forces near Taejon, South Korea. The Army declared him deceased on Dec. 31, 1953. Interment services are pending. Read about Bray.

-- Army Pvt. Ballard McCurley was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, during the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest. On Nov. 29, 1944, his battalion went to a reserve position in the woods west of the town of Hürtgen. According to witnesses, while clearing out a tree stump, McCurley inadvertently set off an enemy anti-personnel mine and he was killed instantly. His remains were not recovered or identified immediately after his loss. Interment services are pending. Read about McCurley.

To sign up new veterans’ advocates, visit: http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm.

As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to vfwac@vfw.org.

To view this week’s and previous editions, visit: http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly.
Veterans courts could get big boost if Congress passes this law

Some former service members who appear in Judge Ricardo Rigual’s Virginia courtroom are given a choice: Go to jail or commit to getting their act together under the guidance of other veterans.

Those who choose the latter are set free, given a mentor and required to pay the judge regular visits.

It’s not exactly a get-out-of-jail-free card; Rigual describes the program as “intense supervision.” But advocates say this gentler approach gaining steam in courtrooms across the country has helped many veterans get back on their feet without the stigma of incarceration.

“They have the foundation to be successful — to take charge of their lives again,” said Rigual, a presiding judge in the 15th Judicial Circuit of Virginia. “We just kind of remind them what they need to do to get their lives back on track.”

Now, federal lawmakers are looking to expand these types of veterans treatment courts, which operate much like drug courts and other specialty courts for veterans who have committed crimes that can, in many cases, be traced back to struggles with PTSD, TBI and other issues related to military service. A bipartisan group of 112 representatives in the House have introduced a plan to provide federal support to states that have adopted these programs by setting up a national network with oversight from the Department of Justice.

Rep. Charlie Crist, D-Fla., who introduced the Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act, told Military Times in an email that the bill would “expand and bolster” these courts to provide veterans with the counseling, care and support services needed to transition into civilian life. Another bill Crist worked on, which also needs final House approval, sets aside $25 million in grants and technical assistance for these programs.
According to figures provided by the advocacy group National Veterans Court Alliance, there are more than 450 veterans treatment courts in 22 states. Nearly half are in Florida alone.

Rigual and other members of the Alliance met in Washington on Wednesday with House representatives and White House staffers to advocate for the bill’s passage, sharing anecdotes of how these courts have saved lives.

Veterans who go through the rehabilitation program are assigned a mentor to help them navigate the transition — things like applying for jobs or securing housing or VA benefits, if eligible. DJ Reyes, a retired colonel who runs one of these programs in Florida, said many of the mentors are combat veterans who have struggled with transition themselves.

“We get it. We walked the mile in the moccasins,” he said. “That’s the secret, the X-factor, the secret sauce piece to this. Because the mentors can relate so quickly with the veterans that they’re assigned to, many times … that veteran mentor is able to help navigate that veteran back to wellness.”

Reyes’ program has helped more than 175 defendants with an estimated 82 percent to 85 percent success rate.

With more funding, support and a national network formed to share best practices, these courts could be even more effective, and more states would be motivated to start them, alliance members said.

While this bill does not require states to stand up veterans treatment courts, the alliance is advocating for that and would eventually like to see these programs at all levels of the American court system — from district courts all the way to federal courts. They also want each veteran graduate get their criminal records expunged.

Alliance Chairman Luis Quiñonez said, “It’s a tough nut to crack because a lot of people ask why should veterans get special treatment? And the answer is because a lot of veterans face things that other people don’t have to face.”

Crist was optimistic that the Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act will see a Senate companion soon and get passed by the end of the year.

“With overwhelming support from members of Congress and veterans organizations, I hope we can quickly move this legislation forward to better support our veterans,” he said. “It’s what they have earned, and what they deserve.”
A more accurate, completely digital DD 214 is on its way

The days of having to keep a tidy copy of your discharge paperwork to prove you were in the service could be coming to an end. The Defense Department is working on creating a fully electronic version of the seminal DD 214 document, which would give veterans access to all of their information and cut down on the privacy concerns raised by the current form.

The goal is to bring the new forms online by 2024 at the latest.

There could also be major changes to the information included on the form, as well as to the way it’s gathered, if DoD follows the recommendations of a recent Rand Corporation study on the effort.

“In some cases, data inaccuracies occur when service members fill out DD Form 214 by hand, a problem which auto-populating data will help correct," according to the report. “However, some interviewees are worried that auto-populated information will not be further verified.”

In interviews with almost 100 stakeholders, including veterans, VA staff, DoD staff and more, many voiced concern about how difficult it is to make sure a DD 214 is correct, and the added difficulty of changing one.

“This effort is all about making something better,” Patricia Mulcahey, the department’s director of officer and enlisted personnel management, told Military Times on Thursday.

By better, she means taking on the first big revamp of the military’s official discharge document since they were first issued in 1950. Legally, Mulcahey said, DoD is obligated to give each separating service member a piece of paper that explains they are leaving active service, the reason for separation and the characterization of the discharge.

However, because the DD 214 has become a touchstone in proving one’s service record, it ballooned to include not only key information like years of service, career field and rank, but awards, education, deployments and units of assignment.

The form itself is an amalgamation of more than 30 bits of information, all pulled from a variety of personnel records, transcripts and other documents that originate from multiple offices and have to be condensed into databases from each service’s human resources directorate and then hand filled-in — and in many cases, corrected — on a submission for a DD 214.

In 2015, when the department was about a decade into its ongoing efforts to digitize as many paper processes as possible, DoD began sending electronic service information to the Veterans
Affairs Department and the Labor Department — two key stops on a veteran’s journey back to civilian life, both paying out post-discharge benefits.

But the full gamut of information available was never necessary to send to them, according to an assistant director of officer and enlisted personnel management, so they got a truncated version with all of the need-to-knows, like rank, years of service and so on.

“If VA has everything that they need on you to adjudicate your benefits, then what do you really need to be bringing them on a piece of paper?” Kent Bauer said.

Perhaps, he added, a hard copy “certificate of release or discharge” could be an abbreviated version, with just the information a veteran would need to prove past service, rather than a detailed history of it.

“Ultimately, I’d love to have this down to something that is really useful and succinct for the member,” Bauer said.

But at the same time, that complete list of information could be online, where a veteran could log in to view and it send or download it if there were ever questions about past assignments, deployments or awards.

There are privacy concerns about having all of that data in a centralized location online, just as there are about having hard copy forms floating around.

“We want to understand what the impacts would be, with information that we have and the ability to dispense it electronically, against the requirement to give people this release certificate and to protect their privacy,” Mulcahey said.

The new DD 214 process could only apply to service members who are not yet separated. Current veterans will keep their existing documentation.

**First steps**

So in 2017, DoD asked Rand to study the idea, and they published their results in May.

One of their top findings, according to the report, is that DoD needs new policies and data management processes to make sure the information on a DD 214 is complete and accurate.

“Policies are also needed to determine who can change inaccurate data,” the report added. “Interviewees reported that the [Defense Manpower Data Center] will often change DD Form 214 data without relaying those changes back to the services, which has created problems with
veterans seeking certain benefits. A policy that requires all data changes to be made at the service level could improve data accuracy.”

Overall, RAND recommended using that feedback to modify the form and update how it’s compiled, while also creating detailed training on the new products, with a phased approach to implementation.

The next step, Mulcahey said, is taking those recommendations and running with them.

The department is looking at about three to five years to get the new DD 214 fully online, Bauer said, which dovetails with the services’ individual efforts to create integrated pay and personnel systems, where something like this form could be accessed in the future.
CERTIFICATE OF RELEASE OR DISCHARGE FROM ACTIVE DUTY

1. NAME (Last, First Middle)
   DEBARBER, CHARLES ANTHONY

2. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH
   ARMY/SO

4a. GRADE, RANK OR O RANK
   SSg

5a. DATE OF BIRTH (YYYYMMDD)

6. RESERVE OBLIGATION TERMINATION DATE (YYYYMMDD)
   00000000

7a. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE DUTY
   BROADWAY HEIGHTS, OHIO

7b. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY
   (City and state, or complete address if known)

8a. LAST DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND MAJOR COMMAND
   D CO 1ST CY B AS

8b. STATION WHERE SEPARATED
   FORT MEADE, MD 20751-5076

9. COMMAND TO WHICH TRANSFERRED
   N/A

11. PRIMARY SPECIALTY (List number, title and years and months in specialty. List additional specialties and titles involving periods of one or more years.)
   35830 SIGINT ANALYST - 8 YRS 3 MOS

12. RECORD OF SERVICE
   a. DATE ENTERED AD THIS PERIOD
      2004
   b. SEPARATION DATE THIS PERIOD
      2013
   c. NET ACTIVE SERVICE THIS PERIOD
      0009
   d. TOTAL PRIOR/ACTIVE SERVICE
      0000
   e. TOTAL PRIOR/ACTIVE SERVICE
      0000
   g. FOREIGN SERVICE
      0000
   h. INITIAL ENTRY TRAINING
      0000
   i. EFFECTIVE DATE OF PAY GRADE
      2011

13. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADDGES, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED (List periods of service)

14. MILITARY EDUCATION (Course title, number of weeks, and month and year completed)
   ADV LDR CRS (ALC), 2011/CMDS SAFETY CRS, 2006/COMBAT LIFS SAVERS CRS, 2007/DEFENSE REUTILIZ MCT, 2006/DLIA-ARABIC BASIC MODRN,
   MANAGER DEV CRS, 2007/SIGNALS INTELLIGENCE ANALYST, 2005/CONT IN BLOCK 18

15. COMMISSIONED THROUGH SERVICE ACADEMY
   YES NO

16. DAYS ACCRUED LEAVE PAID
   45 5

17. MEMBER WAS PROVIDED COMPLETE DENTAL EXAMINATION AND ALL APPROPRIATE DENTAL SERVICES AND TREATMENT WITHIN 90 DAYS PRIOR TO SEPARATION
   YES NO

18. REMARKS
   2009/NOTHING FOLLOWS

19. MAILING ADDRESS AFTER SEPARATION (Include ZIP Code)
   20631 LOGAN RD APT A9
   FAIRVIEW PARK OHIO 44126-6000

20. NEAREST RELATIVE (Name and address - Include ZIP Code)
   THOMAS DEBARBER
   2486 NORTH WEST RIDGE RD
   ASHTABULA OHIO 44004

21. MEMBER SIGNS COPY 9 BE SENT TO THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
   (WASHINGTON, DC)

22. OFFICIAL AUTHORIZED TO SIGN (Last name, first middle)
   JOHNSON, VYNTEA E
   20131125

DD FORM 214, AUG 2009
PREVIOUS EDITION IS OBSOLETE.

MEMBER - 1

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