

Retirement and Military Personnel

The VFW's Concerns:

The VFW has long argued that Department of Defense (DOD) retirement pay and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) service-connected disability compensation are fundamentally different benefits, earned for different reasons. Yet, military retirees with at least twenty years of service and who are less than fifty percent service-connected disabled are required to offset their retiree pay with the amount of VA disability compensation they receive. Chapter 61 retirees who were medically retired before serving twenty years face the same dollar-for-dollar offset. Currently, more than 50,000 Chapter 61 retirees who sustained combat-related injuries while serving are unjustly being denied the benefits they deserve.

In recent years, military housing has been plagued with widespread complaints of neglected or careless repairs and unsafe conditions including mold, lead-based paint, asbestos, poor water quality, and sewage. Still, Congress and service members do not have a centralized tool to allow feedback and provide information on all base housing and related housing company performance, which makes proactive oversight and informed housing decisions difficult for those who are eligible.

In recent years, Congress implemented several changes to the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). In the last twelve months, VFW Service Officers collected over 2,000 surveys from transitioning members, their families, and veterans. Results indicate that some of the new TAP mandates are not being implemented as Congress intended, such as participation in TAP no later than 365 days before separation and completion of at least one track for those in a Tier 3 counseling pathway. The VFW is also concerned that service members are not being connected to resources in the geographic areas in which they will reside after service.

Members of the armed forces can receive different types of separation documents depending on individual service characteristics such as duty status and time served. While the DD Form 214 (DD-214) is the widely accepted standard for proof of military service, members of the Guard and Reserve receive a DD-214 only under certain conditions. Moreover, a 2019 RAND Corporation study found that the DD-214 neither captures cumulative service for these members nor includes Guard and Reserve data, complicating access to the full breadth of their earned benefits.

The VFW urges Congress to:

- Pass H.R. 1282 / S. 344, *Major Richard Star Act*, which would enable Chapter 61 veterans who sustained combat-related injuries to be entitled to DOD retirement pay and VA disability compensation without offset.
- Enact legislation that would create a new online feedback tool for military housing, similar to the GI Bill Comparison Tool, to serve as a central point of information for congressional oversight.
- Conduct periodic Committee on Armed Services hearings on transition to ensure DOD compliance with the law.
- Pass S. 1291, *Record of Military Service for Members of the Armed Forces Act of 2021*, which would enable accurate accounting of service periods and milestones for all Active and Reserve Component members via a single, standard record of military service.