

**STATE OF ALASKA
THE LEGISLATURE**

2009

Source
CSHJR 10(HSS)

**Legislative
Resolve No.**
25



Urging the United States Congress to improve health care for veterans.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

WHEREAS the Veterans Health Administration in the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the gateway to veterans' health care, is backlogged because of inadequate resources; and

WHEREAS the Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform is composed of the American Legion, AMVETS, Blinded Veterans Association, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Vietnam Veterans of America; and

WHEREAS the Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform has found the current funding mechanism for veterans' health care to be unreliable and vulnerable to political posturing, cost cutting, and budget gimmickry; and

WHEREAS the number of veterans increases every day as members of the military return from overseas and re-enter civilian life; and

WHEREAS the medical needs of returning veterans, especially those suffering from traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and other combat-related

psychological injuries, must be met; and

WHEREAS the Veterans Affairs Healthcare System facility in Anchorage, the Veterans Affairs Community-based Outpatient Clinics at Fort Wainwright and in Kenai, and the soon to open facilities in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Juneau, and Homer provide outpatient services for Alaska's veterans; and

WHEREAS the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009, introduced in the 111th Congress, allows for a two-fiscal-year budget authority for veterans' health care programs and requires the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study on the adequacy and accuracy of baseline model projections for veterans' health care expenditures of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS the Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform endorses the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009; and

WHEREAS veterans of the United States-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are entitled to five years of health care without charge from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs regardless of the priority group to which they are assigned, but are reimbursed for the cost of traveling to access that care only if they meet the eligibility criteria in the travel regulations of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs; and

WHEREAS United States Senator Lisa Murkowski conducted a hearing under the auspices of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in November 2007 that established that veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq who live in rural Alaska have limited or no access to their earned United States Department of Veterans Affairs health benefits and that the Alaska Native health system and community health centers, which are severely underfunded, are providing care to these veterans without reimbursement from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs at the expense of the Native health system's and community health centers' primary missions; and

WHEREAS, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs "CARES Decision" states, "Medical care is a key component of the benefits and services enacted by Congress in recognition of the service, and sometimes the sacrifice, of the men and women whose military service preserved and protected America's freedoms."; and

WHEREAS in written testimony to the United States House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Andy Behrman, Rural Health Policy chair of the National Rural Health Association,

asserted that "The disproportionate number of rural Americans serving in the military has created a disproportionate need for veteran's care in rural areas and yet rural areas are less likely to have VA services available to them," that "time and distance prevent many rural veterans from getting their healthcare benefits through a VHA facility," and that other approaches are "readily available in the VA system and in the rural health landscape that could improve this situation"; and

WHEREAS the written testimony of the National Rural Health Association also stresses the problem that "Federally Qualified Community Health Centers (CHCs) serve millions of rural Americans, but most veterans cannot use their VA health benefits to receive care at these CHCs" because a "national policy advocating VHA-CHC collaboration has not emerged in an effective way"; and

WHEREAS the written testimony of the National Rural Health Association emphasizes that a "limited number of collaborations between the VHA and CHCs already exist and have proven to be prudent and cost-effective solutions to serving eligible veterans in remote areas" and that this "model of collaboration between VHA and CHCs might do well in other rural states and with other rural providers and systems of care and should be implemented further"; and

WHEREAS a report written by David R. Selig, Chief Executive Officer of the Community Care Network of Virginia, provides a concrete proposal of collaboration between community health centers and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs by suggesting that community health centers "serve as a vehicle for increasing access to primary care for Veterans" and presents a model where community health centers "function as a Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) as defined by the Department of Veterans Affairs"; and

WHEREAS the existing community health centers and tribal health organizations infrastructure in Alaska should be used to its full potential to provide access to cost-effective, quality care for Alaska veterans whether through a Community Based Outpatient Clinic arrangement, a network arrangement, or individual arrangements with individual community health centers or tribal clinics; and

WHEREAS community health centers and tribal health organizations provide comprehensive primary care and mental health and substance abuse services to medically

underserved areas and populations, including veterans who do not reside near a VA health care facility;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States Congress to provide adequate funding and resources to enable the Veterans Health Administration to properly care for the health care needs of all veterans by adopting a method similar to that proposed in the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States Congress to provide the United States Department of Veterans Affairs with sufficient, timely, and predictable funding for veterans' health care programs; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States Congress to ensure that health care services follow veterans to where they live and work so that veterans are not obligated to search for the veterans' services to which they are entitled; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States Congress to increase funding for research into traumatic brain injuries; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States Congress to encourage the Veterans Health Administration to improve its electronic claims filing process and its ability to use information contained in military records; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature supports federal and state funding and other efforts to ensure that veterans across the state have access to quality health care at community health centers, community mental health centers, substance abuse treatment centers, tribal health organizations, and other appropriate local providers in the outlying areas where the United States Veterans Administration does not have clinics.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Barack Obama, President of the United States; the Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Vice-President of the United States and President of the U.S. Senate; the Honorable Robert C. Byrd, President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate; the Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; the Honorable Daniel Akaka, Chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs; the Honorable Bob Filner, Chair of the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs; the Honorable Eric K. Shinseki, United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs; the Honorable

Michael B. Donley, United States Secretary of the Air Force; the Honorable Pete Geren, United States Secretary of the Army; and the Honorable Lisa Murkowski and the Honorable Mark Begich, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.