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## Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act

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*Reps. Mike Levin (D-CA), Rosendale (R-MT), Ryan (D-OH), and McMorris Rodgers (R-WA)*

- ❖ Many veterans do not utilize the benefits they have earned because they are unaware or unable. Out of 19 million veterans in the United States, only about nine million are enrolled in VA health care, five million receive disability compensation, and three million are active VA home loan participants—with other VA programs showing similar rates of underutilization.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ **About County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs):**
  - CVSOs are local county employees who are nationally accredited by the VA to prepare, present, and prosecute VA claims; and are often the first to inform veterans about their eligibility for VA programs and services. They also help enroll veterans into the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and provide assistance on a range of benefits, including service-connected disability compensation, VA home loans, education benefits, and job placement assistance.
  - Additionally, CVSOs perform much of the VA's legwork for filing claims in their regions with a modest number of approximately 1,700 accredited representatives throughout 36 states and two Native American Tribes. These employees are responsible for successfully processing nearly \$43 billion in claims annually for direct compensation and pension benefits for veterans. If health care and other benefits are included, that number rises to nearly \$86 billion.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ **How the CVSO Act Helps:**
  - The *CVSO Act* will authorize \$50 million annually for five years for competitive grants to expand the work of CVSOs or comparable entities. VA will award grants to states in order to improve outreach to veterans, assist in the development and submittal of claims on behalf of veterans, hire additional CVSOs, and train CVSOs for VA accreditation. To receive funds, a state must submit an application including a detailed plan for the use of these funds, how they will meet underserved veterans' needs, and other information.
  - Because veterans treated at VA are significantly less likely to complete the act of suicide than veterans outside the system<sup>3</sup>, the bill directs VA to prioritize grants that will serve areas with high rates of veteran suicide, Veteran Crisis Line referrals, or CVSO shortages. To ensure funds are utilized effectively, VA will develop required outcome measures, track the use of benefits among populations served by grants, and report to Congress annually. Grants must be used to supplement, not replace, state or local funding.
- ❖ **Support:**
  - The CVSO Act is supported by the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO), National Association of Counties (NACo), National Association of State Departments of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA), and several counties and state CVSO associations. Sens. Baldwin (D-WI) and Sullivan (R-AK) are sponsoring companion legislation in the Senate.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, [www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/Stats\\_at\\_a\\_glance\\_12\\_31\\_20.PDF](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/Stats_at_a_glance_12_31_20.PDF)

<sup>2</sup> National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) analysis of FY2020 Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/expenditures.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, [www.research.va.gov/topics/suicide.cfm](http://www.research.va.gov/topics/suicide.cfm)