

Dear Friends,

By Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

The start of the year has been filled with incredible moments of perseverance, solidarity, and legislative progress for our community. I want to take a moment to reflect on some of these milestones and the impact they are having on our members and Chapter.

Winter Sports Clinic at Mt. Sunapee on January 13-16th

Last month I had the privilege of attending the closing banquet for the Winter Sports Clinic at Mt. Sunapee in New Hampshire. This annual event, organized by the VA Healthcare Boston and the New England Healing Sports Association (NEHSA), is a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience of our members. Adaptive skiing, snowboarding, and other winter sports provide more than just recreation - they empower veterans to push beyond limitations, rediscover confidence, and embrace new challenges. Chapter members took on the slopes, some for the first time. The energy, determination, and support among

participants and volunteers was truly inspiring. Programs like this highlight the importance of adaptive sports in

Chapter members took on the slopes, some for the first time. The energy, determination, and support among participants and volunteers was truly inspiring.

rehabilitation and mental well-being. We extend our deepest gratitude to the organizers, instructors, and volunteers who made this experience possible. Their dedication helps change lives and reminds our members that their journey to independence does not end with an injury - it evolves with new possibilities. At the banquet Chapter President and National Director Brad Carlson presented a generous check from our Chapter to the VA Healthcare Boston in support of the Clinic. We also gave attendees snow hats branded with our Chapter logo. See Vice-President Mike Moran's article in this edition for more information (and pictures) from the Clinic.



Winter Sports Clinic attendees at closing ceremonies.

Major Legislative Win for our Chapter

A momentous achievement for our organization recently came with the passing of the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act. This critical legislation represents a significant step forward in ensuring better healthcare, services, and benefits for veterans and their caregivers. Named in honor of Senator Elizabeth Dole's tireless advocacy for military families and caregivers, the act expands access to essential healthcare services, strengthens caregiver support programs, and enhances benefits that many of our members rely on. This victory is a direct result of the relentless advocacy of veterans' organizations nationwide, especially our friends at PVA and our

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PVA Releases 2025 Policy Priorities

With a new Congress and a new Administration in Washington, D.C., PVA's priorities for 2025 are focused on ensuring access to the care and benefits PVA members have earned and the civil rights protections they deserve. We look forward to working with our champions to move these priorities forward throughout the year.

PVA priorities for 2025 are as follows:

- **Protect VA's Specialized Health Care Services**
- **Increase Access to Long-Term Services and Supports for Veterans with SCI/D**
- **Improve Veterans' Financial Security**
- **Enhance Access to Health Care Services for Veterans with SCI/D**
- **Defend the Freedoms of Veterans with Disabilities**

We need your help in pushing our priorities forward. Sign PVA's SCI/D System of Care petition and count your voice. Scan the QR Code or click the link below.



<https://www.votervoicenet/PVA/Petitions/5455/Respond>

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Executive Director's Report

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By Mark Murphy

Executive Director NEPVA



own Chapter advocacy work over the last years. It serves as a reminder that when we raise our voices together, we can drive meaningful change. Please see my article in this newsletter edition to learn more about the full implications of the passing of this critical legislation.

New Chapter Membership Outreach and Support Program

I am currently working to devise a brand-new program for our Chapter: The New England Chapter Membership Outreach and Support Program. In next month's newsletter I will share more details about this program, but as a preview I can share that it is a new initiative designed to strengthen our connections with our members throughout each area of the New England states to help ensure they receive the resources, advocacy, and support they deserve.

This program will focus on proactive engagement through direct outreach, peer support, and personalized assistance to help members navigate benefits, healthcare, and adaptive

opportunities. Through regular in-person events and check-ins, community and social events, and partnerships with local organizations, we will aim to create a stronger support network for our members. Whether you are a longtime member or newly joined the Chapter, our goal is to make sure you always feel supported, heard, and empowered. Stay tuned for more details on upcoming events and opportunities with this innovative and new program.

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
 Executive Director

Reintroduction of PVA Priority Legislation

With the new Congress underway, legislation is slowly being reintroduced, including several bills in line with PVA's 2025 Policy Priorities.

First, Representative Julia Brownley (D-CA) reintroduced the Veterans Infertility Treatment Act of 2025 (H.R. 220), which authorizes in vitro fertilization (IVF) to be included in the medical benefits package offered by the VA. In order to access VA's IVF benefit, you must have a service-connected infertility diagnosis which is very difficult to prove. H.R. 220 would allow veterans enrolled in VA care to access IVF services if they are struggling with infertility.

Next, Representative David Valadao (R-CA) and Representative Morgan McGarvey (D-KY) have reintroduced the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act (H.R. 1147), which would create the Advisory Committee on

Equal Access at the VA. The purpose of the committee would be to address physical barriers, identify websites that are inaccessible, improve access to medical equipment, and remove other barriers veterans may face throughout the VA and in accessing its services.

Finally, Representative Brad Sherman (D-CA) has reintroduced the Housing Unhoused Disabled Veterans Act (H.R. 965), which would allow more disabled veterans to access housing resources from agencies like the Department of Housing and Urban Development by ensuring their VA disability compensation is not considered earned income. Veterans struggling with housing insecurities are often barred from non-VA resources because they are considered to earn above the Average Median Income. This bill would remove that impediment to veterans accessing needed services.

Passing of the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act

By: Mark Murphy, Executive Director

On January 21, 2025, the United States Congress passed the long-awaited Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, a monumental piece of legislation designed to enhance healthcare, services, and benefits for veterans. Named in honor of the influential Senator Elizabeth Dole, a long-time advocate for veterans and their families, the act holds significant implications for veterans across the country, particularly those in New England. Our Chapter advocacy team is proud to have pushed for the passing of this critical legislation for our members as it has been a major part of many conversations we have had with congressional offices over the last several years.

A Historic Moment for Veterans Care

The Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act is a sweeping reform aimed at modernizing the systems that provide care and assistance to veterans. Its passage is seen as a tribute to Dole's decades-long commitment to improving the quality of life for veterans. The legislation promises to bolster funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), enhance mental health services, improve accessibility to benefits, and provide more comprehensive support for veterans in underserved regions.

Key components of the bill include:

- Expanded healthcare services for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries (TBI), and other service-related injuries.
- Modernization of the VA's digital infrastructure, ensuring more efficient delivery of services and faster processing of claims.
- Expanded benefits for caregivers, acknowledging the essential role of those who assist disabled veterans.
- Increased support for rural and underserved communities, where access to veterans' services has historically been limited.

For our New England Chapter, this new law offers much-needed improvements to the quality of care and resources available to our members. In collaboration with PVA, we have long advocated for increased access to healthcare, better compensation, and support for veterans who have sustained catastrophic disabilities. The act's provision for increasing mental health care options is especially significant for many veterans in New England, where long winters and limited access to specialized services have sometimes left Chapter members feeling isolated and without the support they need.

The passage of this legislation holds both immediate and long-term implications for our Chapter:

1. **Improved Healthcare Access:** The new act includes provisions to increase healthcare infrastructure in areas with a high population of veterans. New England, with its dense veteran population, particularly in states like Massachusetts and Maine, stands to benefit greatly from these improvements. This includes not just enhanced physical healthcare, but also better mental health services, which will be critical in regions facing a shortage of mental health professionals.
2. **Support for Caregivers:** Many of our Chapter members rely on family members and loved ones for day-to-day care. The increased support for caregivers under the new legislation ensures that they will have access to better training, resources, and financial assistance. This support will be especially critical for the aging veteran population in New England, where many veterans return home to live with family members.
3. **Increased Advocacy and Outreach:** PVA is known for its strong advocacy efforts on behalf of veterans, and the new law creates opportunities for these efforts to continue to flourish. As the VA's claims processing hopefully becomes more efficient, Chapter members will be able to expedite their claims, receive faster responses, and ultimately benefit from the advocacy and outreach services at both the national and Chapter levels.

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From the President's Desk

by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President

Dear Friends,

As we move further into 2025, I am pleased to share updates on several key events and initiatives that will help us continue to support and empower our Chapter and members.

National Veterans Wheelchair Games – Registration is Now Open!

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) is just around the corner in Minneapolis from July 17-22nd, and registration is now open! This annual event is a celebration of strength, resilience, and camaraderie for veterans who use wheelchairs. Whether you are an athlete, a spectator, or a volunteer, the NVWG is a fantastic way to come together with fellow veterans from across the nation. The NVWG offers a wide variety of sports, from archery to cornhole to basketball, and is a great opportunity for all skill levels to challenge themselves and enjoy the spirit of competition. If you're interested in participating in this year's games, I encourage you to register early to ensure you secure your spot. Please note that you need to be certified and cleared by your doctor or nurse practitioner to compete. Let me know if you need assistance with the registration process or visit the official NVWG website at www.wheelchairgames.org for more information. Let's make this year's games the most memorable yet!

Winter Sports Clinic in New Hampshire

Last month, a group of our members had the opportunity to participate in the Winter Sports Clinic in New Hampshire. This is an annual event that allows veterans to engage in sports like skiing, snowboarding, and adaptive sledding, providing an outlet for physical activity and connection in the

winter months. The clinic also offers a chance to connect with new and old friends in a supportive and encouraging environment. I would like to thank the volunteers, sponsors, and the entire Winter Sports Clinic team for their hard work in organizing such a fantastic experience. A special shout-out to our members who represented our Chapter with pride and enthusiasm, including Chapter Vice-President and Sports Director Mike Moran and Director Gary Jezerski. It was my pleasure to attend the closing ceremonies and dinner with Executive Director Mark Murphy, where we presented a check on behalf of the Chapter to the VA Boston Healthcare System along with winter hats with the Chapter logo for all attendees.

Chapter Board of Directors Elections – June 2025

It's never too early to start thinking about our Chapter Board of Directors elections, which will take place in June. The Board plays a vital role in steering the Chapter's initiatives and ensuring we remain focused on our mission to improve the lives of our members in New England. Serving on the Board is a rewarding way to make a direct impact on our community and help shape the future of our Chapter. More details regarding nomina-

tions and election procedures will be sent out closer to the election date.

Closing

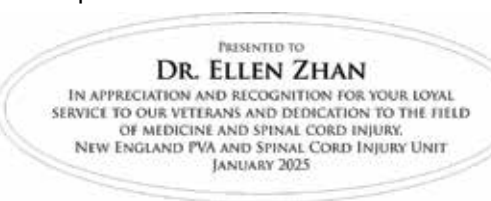
As always, I want to express my deep gratitude for your unwavering support of our Chapter. We are stronger together, and your dedication makes all the difference in the lives of our members. Whether it's competing at the NVWG, enjoying the Winter Sports Clinic, or volunteering on our Board, there are countless ways for you to get involved and make an impact. Stay tuned for more updates in the coming months, and don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or ideas. We are here for you!

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson
Chapter President and National Director



Left; Col. Matthew Edwards from the VA Boston is being presented with a check from Brad on behalf of the Chapter at the Winter Sports Clinic. Right; Dr. Ellen Zhan being presented with a commemorative clock from Brad in recognition of her retirement from the VA.



IBVSOs Release VA Budget Recommendations

While Congress remains focused on finalizing funding for the current fiscal year, The Independent Budget veterans service organizations (IBVSOs)—PVA, DAV, and VFW—are looking to the future. On February 13, the IBVSOs released, “The Independent Budget Recommendations for the Department of Veterans Affairs for Fiscal Years 2026 and 2027.” The report serves as a comprehensive roadmap to ensure the VA is fully funded and capable of carrying out its mission to serve veterans and their families, both now and in the future.

For fiscal year (FY) 2026, the IBVSOs are recommending \$166.4 billion for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which would enable the department to continue to provide timely and high-quality care. The Independent Budget (IB) report details specific funding levels and targeted increases for VHA programs, including a \$2 billion increase to strengthen long-term services and supports to meet the specialized needs of disabled veterans and their caregivers; a \$1.4 billion boost to fill health care vacancies; and a \$1 billion increase to cover the projected growth of new veterans seeking VA care.

For the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), the IBVSOs recommend a total of \$6.5 billion for FY 2026—a roughly \$1 billion increase over the projected FY 2025 levels—and \$296 million for the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. The VBA increases include a \$200 million rise to bring down the backlog of over 235,000 pending claim decisions; \$10 million more to support the Veteran Readiness and Employment program due to an unprecedented number of applications; and a \$32 million increase to implement VA’s Transition Assistance Program (TAP) 6.0, to increase in-person TAP classes and ensure adequate staffing.

The IBVSOs also continue to call for improvements in funding VA infrastructure projects. Specifically, we call on Congress to significantly increase funding to nearly \$10 billion—a three-fold increase over FY 2025. For FY 2026, the IBVSOs recommend a total of \$5.1 billion for the major construction account to increase staffing and begin reducing the VA’s growing infrastructure backlog.

Update on Efforts to Reduce the Size of the Federal Government

PVA continues to monitor efforts to reduce the size of the federal government and the effect these efforts will have on the VA and other federal agencies that serve veterans with disabilities. Most recently, on February 13, 1,000 VA probationary employees were fired, including those who support veterans benefits and services. It’s unclear what the short and long-term effects will be on VA programs, benefits, and services. **We will continue to advocate for the VA and other agencies to have the resources required to serve the needs of paralyzed veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors.**

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REMINDER: Survey to Assess Accessibility During the 2024 General Election

PVA National is conducting a survey on accessible voting. The study aims to learn more about the voting experience of people with disabilities in the 2024 general election. The feedback received from this survey will inform our efforts to educate members as they face accessibility barriers in voting. This information will provide valuable insight and guide preparation for future webinars and other resources related to voting accessibility. To take the survey, scan the QR or click [here](#).



Former Representative Doug Collins Confirmed as the New VA Secretary

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins was sworn in as the 12th secretary of the VA on February 5, shortly after the Senate confirmed him for the position by a vote of 77-23. Secretary Collins represented Georgia’s rural Ninth Congressional District for nearly a decade before attempting an unsuccessful run for the Senate. He has served in the military since 2002 and is currently a colonel in the Air Force Reserve.

In his message to veterans and VA employees, Secretary Collins pledged to take great care of America’s veterans by first putting them at the center of everything VA does. He also promised to deliver timely access to care and benefits to those who are eligible to receive them, celebrate the vast majority of VA employees who do a great job every day, and hold employees accountable when they fall short of the mission. He pledged to also challenge the status quo in order to find new and better ways of helping VA beneficiaries. We look forward to working with Secretary Collins in the coming months on ways the department can better meet the needs of our members.

NE PATRIOTS WHEELCHAIR FOOTBALL CLINIC

The VA Boston Healthcare System, Adaptive Sports New England, and the New England Patriots Wheelchair Football Team hosted an introductory Veterans Wheelchair Football Clinic on Jan. 24, 2025, at the Brockton VA campus.

During the clinic, Veterans learned how to control a sports wheelchair, throw a spiral, perform routes, and play defense from Vernon Crawford, a former Patriots linebacker, and Patriots Wheelchair Football Team members. No. 35 Omar Benitez, team captain No. 45 Jon Brace and team captain No. 4 Joe LeMar. NEPVA Board Member Gary Jezierski about to catch a pass in the photo was on had for the clinic.



VA Boston HCS photo by Deirdre Salvas

Sports & Recreation

The 27th Annual New England Winter Sports Clinic

By Mike Moran, Chapter Vice-President & Sports Director

The 27th Annual New England Winter Sports Clinic for disabled veterans took place at Mount Sunapee in New Hampshire last month. Over 120 volunteers from the Boston VA Health Care System, the New England Healing Sports Association (NEHSA Adaptive Sports & Recreation New England), and the local community supported 45 veteran athletes, 14 of whom were new to this flagship winter sports program.

Along with three days of adaptive skiing, on Monday afternoon following registration and team assignments veteran athletes participated in a sled hockey clinic at the Campion Arena in Hanover, New Hampshire. The sled hockey clinic

The work put in by volunteers to get us fitted into the sled, geared up, and on the ice... is truly amazing!

is corrugated chaos both on and off the ice. The work put in by volunteers to get us fitted into the sled, geared up, and on the ice in such a short period of time is truly amazing! The week was full of activities to occupy our time when we weren't at the hill. Cardio drumming facilitated by Jenny Vulpis, Adaptive Sports Coordinator at the VA Boston Healthcare System, was one way to get loose and the blood flowing. "Morning Flow" with Julia was also a popular

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Scan the QR to see the winter sports photos.



Photographers

- Eric Emmerling
- Laura Vigneau
- Emily Ostroff
- Kristy Odiorne Romero



NEPVA MEMBERS ENJOYING THE 2025 WINTER SPORTS CLINIC



Service Officers Report

by Michael Snape,
Senior National Service Officer

Hello to chapter members. The cold and chilly month of February will soon make for the spring month of March. There is hope for warmer days ahead. This month's article discusses several changes in the recently passed Elizabeth Dole Home- and Community-Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act of 2023, which was signed in to law in January 2025, that may affect chapter members.

The act makes changes to home care and caregiver programs provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Under the act, the cost of providing non-institutional alternatives to nursing home care normally may not exceed 100% of the cost that would have been incurred if a veteran had been furnished VA nursing home care.

A major change is in the amount of funding provided by the VA for non-institutional alternatives to nursing home care. Under the act, the cost of providing noninstitutional alternatives to nursing home care normally may not exceed 100% of the cost that would have been incurred if a veteran had been furnished VA nursing home care. (Please note that under previous law, these expenditures were capped at 65% of the cost). For specified veterans, **the VA may exceed 100% of the cost if it determines the higher cost is in the best interest of such veterans** (for example, veterans with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a spinal cord injury, or a condition the VA Secretary determines to be similar to these conditions).

The act also included direction to the VA to initiate a pilot program to provide homemaker and home health aide services to veterans who reside in communities with a shortage of homemaker/home health aides. As we know, this is a significant issue throughout the New England area, as many of our towns/cities are located in rural areas with limited access to homemaker/health aide availability.

The pilot program will be designed for veterans residing in communities with a shortage of homemaker/home health aides; the program design would deliver Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) specifically to veterans living in areas where there is a limited pool of available home health aides, allowing them to receive necessary personal care services like bathing, dressing, and meal preparation within their own homes despite the local workforce shortage. This may involve initiatives like increased outreach to potential caregivers, specialized training programs for aides, or collaborative efforts with local agencies to address the gap in care availability. This may also include expansion of the Veteran Directed Care program for increased access to home and community-based services. The program will be rolled out in five geographic areas which the VA secretary determines there is a shortage of home health aides

For veterans or family caregivers who are discharged from the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers after reassessment; a caregiver support coordinator must provide for a personalized transition to an appropriate program. Additionally, for caregivers not found eligible for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, the VA will provide specified support and benefits to caregivers of certain disabled veterans. The act will provide grants and contracts to mental health service providers for family caregivers, additionally, the act will provide support resources for additional education and training for caregivers.

We will be discussing other changes to VA programs affected by the Elizabeth Dole Home- and Community-Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act of 2023 in future articles. As always, if you have any questions regarding these changes or other issues, please reach out to your local Veteran Service Officer for assistance.

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WSC

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option as well. The Community Center in Lebanon, New Hampshire was the location for pickleball and arts and crafts. The transportation team made it look easy getting us to where we needed to be throughout the week. Fortunately, the weather was in our favor throughout the week and didn't make their job any tougher than it had to be.

Closing ceremonies for the Clinic were Thursday evening at the Lebanon Hilton Garden Inn. After dinner the long-awaited video presentation of accomplishments from the week and Annual Award winners were recognized. All in all, it was a fantastic week. We are now looking forward to the Summer Sports Clinic, and of course next year's Winter Sports Clinic as well!

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA – REGIONAL NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICERS

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FY25 EVENT SCHEDULE

Note: ** means this is not a PVA-sponsored event.



February 2025

Bayou Gulf States Boccia Tournament	February 1-2, 2025	Gulfport, MS
Central Florida Air Gun Tournament	February 8-9, 2025	Orlando, FL
PVA Rugby Invitational	Feb 14-16, 2025	Louisville, KY
Florida Gulf Coast Bowling Tournament	February 16-19, 2025	Tampa, FL

March 2025

Mid-Atlantic Billiards Tournament	March 14-16, 2025	Midlothian, VA
Wisconsin Air Gun Tournament	March 21-22, 2025	Racine, WI
Long Beach Boccia Tournament	March 29-30, 2025	Long Beach, CA

April 2025

Wheelchair Football Camp	April 3-6, 2025	Birmingham, AL
Citrus Slam Bass Fishing Tournament	April 4-6, 2025	Kissimmee, FL
Pocahontas Off-Road Spring Camp	April 9-13, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Off-Road Classic Paracycling Race	April 12, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
Mid-America Billiards Tournament	April 10-12, 2025	Oklahoma City, OK
Bluegrass Bash Bass Tournament	April 11-13, 2025	Kuttawa, KY
Texas Bowling Tournament	April 30-May 2, 2025	San Antonio, TX

May 2025

Puerto Rico Year-end Boccia Tournament	May 3-4, 2025	San Juan, PR
Vaughan Trapshoot Tournament	May 23-25, 2025	Elburn, IL
Texas Air Gun Tournament	May 31-Jun 1, 2025	San Antonio, TX

June 2025

Capital Clash Bass Tournament (Year-end event)	June 13-15, 2025	La Plata, MD
PVA Colonial Pickleball Tournament	June 14-15, 2025	Perry Point, MD
Iowa Trapshoot Tournament	June 20-22, 2025	Cedar Rapids, IA
Teton Outdoor Adventure	June 23-27, 2025	Jackson Hole, WY
PVA Bowling National Championships	June 26-29, 2025	Omaha, NE
Wisconsin Trapshoot Tournament (Year-end Event)	June 27-29, 2025	Green Bay, WI

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Elizabeth Dole Act

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4. Economic Implications for Veterans: With the new legislation improving financial compensation for veterans with disabilities, many of our members who have been living with the physical and emotional scars of their service can expect to receive better financial support. The improved benefits also include more favorable pension plans, which will provide economic stability for veterans and their families.
5. Educational and Vocational Benefits: The act also includes provisions for expanded educational and vocational training for veterans. New England, with its higher education institutions and robust job market, is set to become an even more attractive region for veterans seeking to transition back to civilian life. Our Chapter can help facilitate these opportunities for members, especially as new programs in this legislation take shape.

Looking Ahead

The passing of the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing effort to support and improve the lives of veterans. For our Chapter, this law represents a new era of improved healthcare, enhanced services, and stronger advocacy. Veterans across New England will benefit from these changes, and we are proud of the extremely hard work we did to get it passed. We are ready to now continue working to ensure that the voices of our members are heard as these new benefits are rolled out.

As the full implications of this historic law unfold, our members here in New England can look forward to more comprehensive support that recognizes their sacrifice and serves their needs. The work is far from over, but with this legislation, a brighter future for veterans across the nation is now within reach.

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New England Chapter

The New England Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America (New England PVA) is a congressionally chartered veterans service organization founded in 1947 that has developed a unique expertise on a wide variety of issues involving the special needs of our members – veterans of the armed forces who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction.

The New England PVA uses that expertise to be the leading advocate for:

- **Quality health care for our members**
- **Research and education addressing spinal cord injury and dysfunction**
- **Benefits available because of our members' military service**
- **Civil rights and opportunities that maximize the independence of our members**

To enable paralyzed veterans to continue to honor this commitment, we recruit and retain members who have the experience, energy, dedication, and passion necessary to manage the organization and ensure adequate resources to sustain the programs essential for the Chapter to achieve its mission.