



PROJECT ADVOCACY

January 6, 2020

THE WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT® ADVOCACY NEWSLETTER

Greetings and welcome to the first edition of Wounded Warrior Project's (WWP) advocacy newsletter *Project Advocacy*. As the nation's largest nonprofit provider of free direct programs and services to wounded, ill, and injured post-9/11 veterans, our mission is vital: to honor and empower our nation's wounded warriors. Since 2003, we have been tireless advocates for our nation's finest, improving the lives of millions of warriors and their families. To help achieve our goals, our [Government and Community Relations team](#) in Washington, DC, collaborates with other veteran and military support groups, and the executive and legislative branches of government, to advance legislation and policies that help warriors and their families and caregivers. We have had some notable successes to date.

In 2005, we helped create the Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance ([TSGLI](#)) program to ease the financial burdens on severely wounded veterans and their families. In 2011, we achieved passage of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. In 2016, we worked to pass legislation enabling veterans who sustained genital trauma [access to in vitro fertilization](#) and adoption benefits. In 2018, we advocated to increase veterans' access to community health care through [the VA MISSION Act](#), and provide commissary and base exchange benefits to all disabled veterans and Purple Heart medal recipients — the largest expansion of these benefits in 60 years.

During the 116th Congress, we are working to improve veterans' mental health care outcomes to increase quality of life and reduce incidents of suicide. We are focused on improving the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Specially Adapted Housing Grant Program and providing TSA Pre-Check to veterans who lost the use of a limb, incurred permanent blindness, have become paralyzed, or require the use of a wheelchair, prosthetic, or other mobility device so they can have a more dignified experience at airport checkpoints. We are also funding research and collecting data on the impact of toxic exposures in collaboration with the Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) working group, and reducing barriers to care for female veterans using the VA. Our Government and Community Affairs team is composed of civilian and veteran experts with broad and diverse backgrounds who are proud to provide wounded warriors a voice in our nation's capital. My staff and I stand ready to assist and look forward to collaborating with all who seek to improve the lives and futures of America's veterans.

Jose Ramos
Vice President, Government and Community Relations
U.S. Navy Veteran

MEET OUR TEAM



JOSE RAMOS — VICE PRESIDENT, GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Jose Ramos has been helping post-9/11 veterans as a member of the WWP team since 2018. Prior to joining WWP, Jose served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as the Special Assistant for Constituent Inquiries and as an appointed commissioner on President Bush's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors. Jose's background as a combat-wounded Navy corpsman informs his current role and helps guide WWP's efforts to promote policies that support the needs of America's wounded warriors and their families. Jose served three combat tours during his Navy service while assigned to a Marine Corps infantry battalion. Jose holds his BA from George Mason University. He is a native of the great state of Texas.



BRIAN DEMPSEY — DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Brian Dempsey specializes in mental health, brain health, and caregiver policy. Brian began his current duties in 2018 and previously served as a WWP staff attorney beginning in 2016. Prior to joining WWP, Brian worked for the VA as an attorney advisor for the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Brian holds a Juris Doctor from Wake Forest University and a BA from University of Miami. He is a native of the great state of New Jersey.



DEREK FRONABARGER — DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Derek Fronabarger specializes in VA benefits, toxic exposures, caregivers, and education. Prior to joining WWP, Derek worked on the Joining Forces initiative at the White House and served as the director of policy and chief of staff for Student Veterans of America. He is a U.S. Army veteran and served as an air defense intelligence tactical operator in both the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. He served an 18-month combat tour in Afghanistan and obtained the rank of sergeant before separating in 2008. Derek holds an MBA from University of South Carolina-Columbia and a BA from College of Charleston. He is a native of the great state of South Carolina.



MEGHAN JACKSON — SPECIALIST, GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Prior to joining WWP in 2019, Meghan worked as a government relations specialist consultant in the defense industry. She holds a BBA in marketing from Southern Methodist University's Cox School of Business. Meghan supports WWP's advocacy on mental health and women veterans' issues. She is a native of the great state of Kansas.

FRONT-BURNER BILLS



As a voice for warriors in Washington, DC, WWP's Government Affairs team fights to address the [issues](#) that matter most to wounded, injured, and ill veterans and their families. We are currently working on:

Specially Adaptive Housing (SAH), [S.2022 / H.R. 3504](#)

For many of America's wounded veterans, navigating their homes to perform everyday tasks can be a potentially dangerous challenge. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) maintains an SAH grant program to help seriously injured veterans purchase or construct an adaptive home or make modifications to an existing home to help accommodate their level of ability. While SAH grants have been helpful to many WWP warriors, the grant process can be improved with congressional action. Eligible SAH grantees include those who have lost the use of both arms and/or both legs, those who are blind in both eyes, and those who have certain severe respiratory injuries or certain severe burns. The total amount of funds that an individual can use is currently \$85,645. A veteran or service member can access these funds up to three times and cannot exceed the capped amount. WWP is currently advocating to:

- Allow full SAH benefit reinstatement every 10 years to accommodate moving and normal life changes.
- Increase the number of times the benefit can be accessed from three to six.
- Increase the number of people who can apply annually from 30 to 120.
- Increase the aggregate amount of the benefit for acquisition of a house with special features from \$85,645 to \$98,492.
- Increase the amount of assistance for adaptations to veterans' residences from \$12,756 to \$19,733.

Veterans Expedited TSA Screening Safe Travel Act, [S.1881 / H.R. 3356](#)

Navigating airport security can be daunting for injured veterans. The VETS Safe Travel Act would grant TSA PreV to veterans who are amputees, paralyzed, or blind at no cost and enable them to pass through airport security easier with prosthetics, wheelchairs, or other mobility aids — allowing for a more dignified experience when passing through security checkpoints at our nation's airports.

National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2019, [S.2661 / H.R.4194](#)

Veteran mental health is a national crisis. According to the 2019 WWP Annual Warrior Survey, 33% of respondents said they had suicidal thoughts in the past two weeks. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a critical tool for preventing suicide, giving people a lifeline in a time of need. Currently a 10-digit phone number, these bills would designate 988 as the three-digit number to reach the hotline, much like 911 is designated for emergencies.

Women Veterans

Women now compose approximately 10% of the veteran community and nearly 17% of the active duty force, and our sisters-in-arms represent the fastest-growing subpopulation of both the military and veteran populations. WWP is working with leaders in Congress to include the bipartisan Women Veterans Task Force to increase the visibility of the two million women who have served in uniform and ensure equitable access to comprehensive health care and benefits that meet their needs. WWP is advocating to ensure VA facilities are increasing access to childcare and hours of operation, improving programs and services to support women during transition, and ensuring quality care for women experiencing military sexual trauma.

For more information about WWP's legislative priorities, [click here](#).



Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) Coalition

Many service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan were exposed to environmental and chemical hazards such as burn pits, depleted uranium, and toxic fragments, which pose potential health risks. [More than 70% of WWP's warriors reported certain exposure to hazardous chemicals](#) or substances during their military service. In June 2019, WWP led the creation of the Toxic Exposures in the American Military (TEAM) coalition to collect data, raise awareness, and advocate for legislation designed to improve health care outcomes for those exposed.

The organizations participating in the coalition are:

- Burn Pits 360
- California Communities Against Toxics (CCAT)
- Cease Fire Campaign
- Dixon Center for Military and Veterans Services
- Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANUS)
- Hunter Seven
- Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)
- Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)
- National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP)
- Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA)
- Task Force Dagger Foundation (TFD)
- The American Legion (TAL)
- The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)
- Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)
- Veteran Warriors
- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
- Vets First
- Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)
- Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)

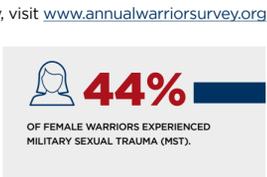
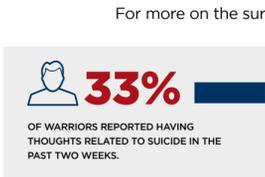
We are urging veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, or Southwest Asia after September 11, 2001, who may have been exposed to airborne hazards from burn pits or other environmental exposures to register with the [VA's Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry](#).

ANNUAL WARRIOR SURVEY

Last month WWP released the findings from our [10th Annual Warrior Survey](#). This survey is the largest and most comprehensive survey of the physical, social, economic, and mental health needs facing the post-9/11 generation of wounded, ill, and injured veterans. We use the findings of our Annual Warrior Survey and feedback from our program teams to identify wounded warriors' needs and advocate for legislative and policy solutions. In addition to helping us better understand the key issues facing wounded warriors and their families, the Annual Warrior Survey helps inform and improve WWP programs and services (appx. \$200M annual spend) and provides important data to Congress, the Department of Defense, and the VA.

KEY FINDINGS

For more on the survey, visit [www.annualwarriorsurvey.org](#)



Watch a short explainer video and download the executive summary and full report [here](#).

COMMISSARY EXPANSION

WWP worked with supporters in Congress and other veteran service organizations to [expand benefits](#) for disabled veterans and help improve the military commissary system by expanding the pool of eligible shoppers. Through a provision in the fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), WWP was able to secure commissary, post-exchange, and morale, welfare, and recreation services (MWR) benefits for Purple Heart medal recipients, former prisoners of war, veterans with service-connected disabilities, and primary veteran caregivers beginning January 1, 2020. This patronage expansion, which grants commissary and military exchange shopping privileges to approximately three million people, is the largest in more than 60 years. Eligible veterans must obtain a Veteran Health Identification Card from the VA to present at DoD and Coast Guard installations for installation and shopping access.

More details on the expansion can be found [here](#).

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