WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT®



MORE THAN 100 WOMEN WARRIORS GATHER IN FRONT OF THE CAPITOL STEPS DURING THE 2026 WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT

NEWSLETTER | NOVEMBER 2026

OPERATION ADVOCACY

Welcome to the November 2026 issue of the Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Operation Advocacy newsletter. WWP's advocacy efforts connect you and your fellow warriors with your elected officials, providing you a voice in our nation's capital and empowering you to discuss the issues that matter most to the veteran community.

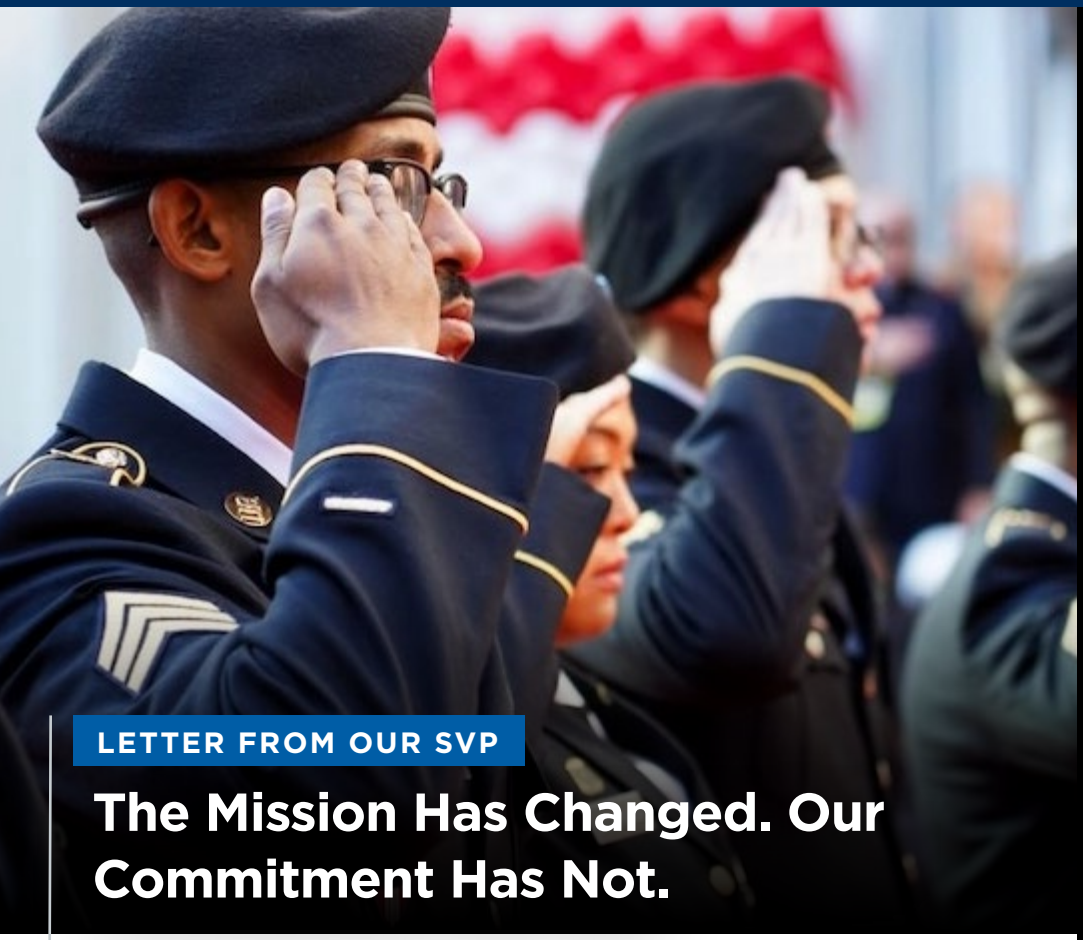
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WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT®



LETTER FROM OUR SVP

The Mission Has Changed. Our Commitment Has Not.

Twenty-five years ago, I was serving as a Navy Hospital Corpsman with a Marine infantry platoon in Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, deployed with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit. We had just finished training in Darwin, Australia, when our nation was attacked on September 11, 2001.

We were already on an operational deployment, but in an instant, the world changed and so did our mission.

Just over two months later, we became part of the first significant conventional American ground force to enter Afghanistan, where we helped establish Camp Rhino. None of us could have known then that the conflict would become our nation's longest war. Looking back, I don't think any of us fully grasped the significance of what we were stepping into. We were focused on the mission in front of us, our responsibilities, and those in uniform to our left and right. I would later deploy twice to Iraq, but in those early days, I could not have imagined how long these wars would last or how deeply they would shape the lives of those who served.

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LETTER FROM OUR SVP (CONTINUED)

Even then, one thing was clear to me: **Nothing would ever be the same.**

When I reflected on the 25th anniversary of 9/11 this September, I found myself thinking about that moment and the generations of Americans who have answered our nation's call to duty. This year, as our country marked 250 years of independence, those reflections feel especially meaningful.

The war in Afghanistan ended, but its consequences remain. More than two decades later, veterans and their families continue to confront the lasting effects of military service — from toxic exposures and traumatic brain injuries to unseen wounds, complex health care needs, and the loss of brothers and sisters in arms. Some of these challenges were apparent when Service members returned home. Others have taken years, even decades, to emerge.

As we honored veterans this Veterans Day, I also thought about those serving in harm's way today. Military operations involving Iran this year have taken American lives and left other Service members wounded. Behind each loss or injury are families whose lives have changed. Veterans Day reminds us that sacrifice is not confined to history, and our obligation to those who serve and their families continues long after their missions end.

We've made tremendous progress in recognizing these sacrifices and expanding care and benefits. Yet important work remains unfinished.

For me, the fight has never truly ended. What has changed is the mission.

Today, that mission is to ensure that those who serve receive the care, benefits, recognition, and opportunities they have earned. This mission is carried forward every day in the halls of Congress, in our communities, and through the collective voices of veterans, families, advocates, and organizations like ours.

That is why Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) continues to advocate for policies that improve the lives of veterans and their families and uphold the promises our nation has made to those who have worn the uniform.

Congress can advance legislation, reshape it, or leave important work unfinished. But no single vote ends our responsibility. Our commitment must remain focused, persistent, and grounded in the voices of those we serve. Veterans' needs do not pause for elections, legislative calendars, or the results of a single vote.

And neither can we.

Honoring veterans is not a responsibility reserved for one day each year. As we reflect on our nation's 250 years and the sacrifices of those who have served, let us remain engaged in the work of supporting veterans and ensuring their voices continue to be heard.

Twenty-five years ago, none of us knew where the events of September 11 would lead. Today, we have a much clearer understanding of the enduring costs of war and the obligation we share to those who bear them.

Our country has changed. The world has changed. The challenges facing our veterans continue to evolve.

But our commitment must remain unwavering — to those who served before us, to those serving in harm's way today, and to the generations who will answer our nation's call tomorrow.



JOSE RAMOS
WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GOVERNMENT
AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS



2026 WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT

Elevating Voices and Championing Solutions

More than 100 women warriors gathered in Washington, D.C., to advocate for the most pressing issues facing women veterans.

In September, more than 100 women warriors traveled to Washington, D.C., for Wounded Warrior Project's 2026 Women Warriors Summit. Through advocacy training, leadership development, peer connection, and direct engagement with policymakers, participants strengthened their advocacy skills, elevated the voices of women warriors, and championed solutions to some of the most pressing issues facing women veterans.

Twenty advocate teams conducted more than 120 meetings — 57 in the Senate and 63 in the House — reaching 68 Republican, 51 Democratic, and one independent office. Advocacy meetings on Capitol Hill generated more than 630 engagements among warriors, congressional staff, and WWP team members.

"I had not attended a summit before, so I didn't quite know what to expect, but it was a fantastic event all the way around," **said Carol Swinson, a woman warrior and summit participant from Florida.**

"Meeting with members of Congress and their staff made me feel like I was truly making a difference for my sister warriors. WWP staff prepared us so well, and each meeting felt more and more impactful."

— CAROL SWINSON
WOMAN WARRIOR AND SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FROM FLORIDA

WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT (CONTINUED)

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

This year, warriors advocated for policies that would strengthen health care, research, and support services for women veterans, including:

- **Advancing research on women veterans' health.** Advocates urged support for *The VOICE for Women Veterans Act*, which was introduced during the summit, that would improve research, data collection, and coordination across the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to better understand and address the unique needs of women veterans.
- **Expanding access to breast cancer screening.** Women warriors called for passage of the *Mammography Access for Veterans Act of 2025* (H.R. 7411 / S. 3395), which would ensure that veterans in every state and Puerto Rico have access to VA mammography services through telescreening, mobile mammography, or full-service screening programs, while also improving accessibility for veterans with disabilities.
- **Strengthening support for women veterans and survivors.** Summit participants encouraged lawmakers to advance key provisions in the *Take Care of America's Veterans Act* (H.R. 9237 / S. 4744), including increased research on menopause, enhanced support for military sexual trauma survivors and veteran mothers, and expanded access to gender-specific and specialized care.

Before heading to Capitol Hill, participants spent a full day preparing for their congressional meetings. WWP's Grassroots and Government Affairs teams provided in-depth policy briefings, advocacy training, and guidance on effective engagements with congressional offices. Warriors also practiced their meetings to confidently share their personal experiences in ways that would help policymakers better understand the issues facing women veterans.

MORE THAN JUST ADVOCACY

While advocacy on Capitol Hill remains the centerpiece of the annual summit, the Women Warriors Summit has grown into a broader leadership and professional development experience, designed to provide participants with the knowledge, relationships, and confidence to remain effective advocates long after they leave Washington.

The summit began with an opening dinner focused on connection and community, featuring warrior comedian Stephanie Kline from WWP-funded community partner Armed Services Arts Partnership (ASAP). Through humor and storytelling, the evening created an opportunity for warriors to connect through shared experiences before beginning several days of advocacy and leadership programming.

The following day was dedicated to preparing participants for their congressional meetings. In addition to policy briefings and meeting practice, warriors heard directly from leaders working in government and health care, and participated in discussions designed to strengthen their advocacy and leadership skills.

Warriors gained an inside perspective on congressional advocacy during a WWP-moderated panel featuring staff from the offices of Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO-06), Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI), and Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA-49).

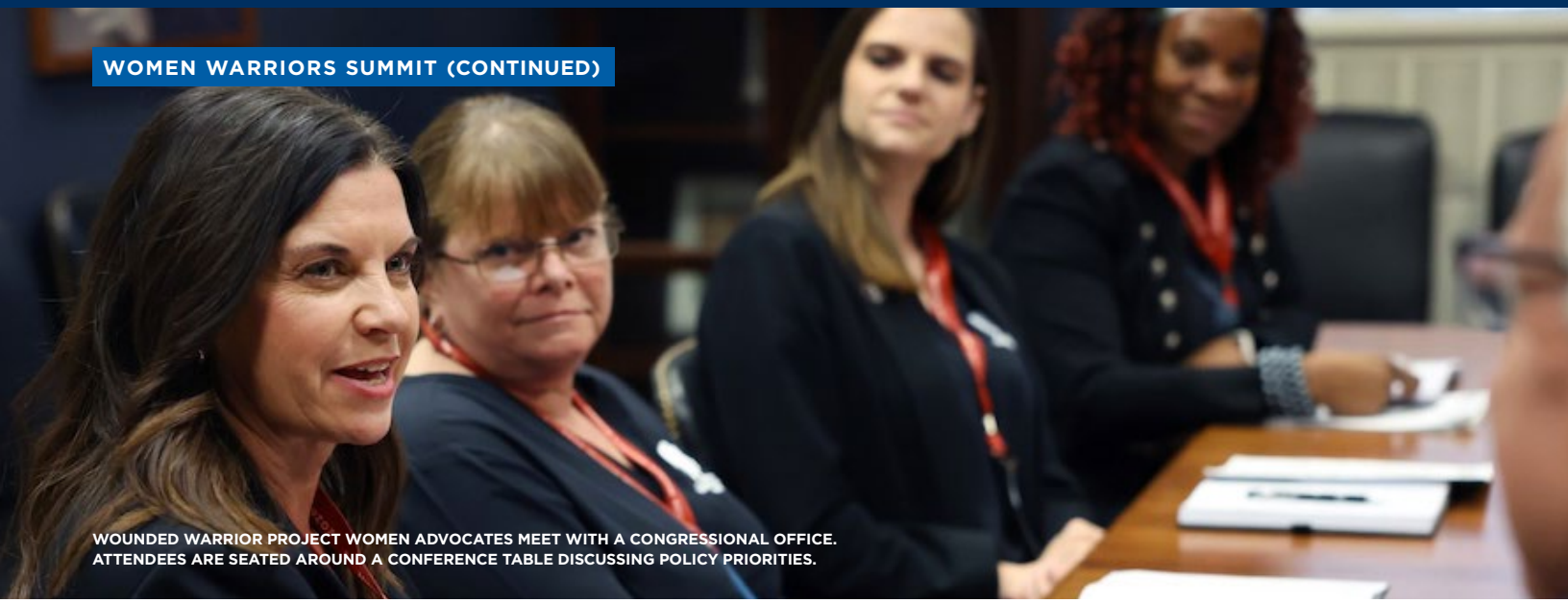
Panelists included Erin Scanlon, Deputy Chief of Staff – Rep. Sam Graves' office, Meghan O'Connor, Senior Policy Advisor – Sen. Mazie Hirono's office, and Alison Feinswog, Chief of Staff – Rep. Mike Levin's office.

The congressional staff shared practical insights on effective constituent engagement, what makes advocacy conversations resonate with lawmakers and their teams, and how veterans can build relationships with congressional offices that extend beyond a single meeting in Washington.

Health care and the experiences of women veterans were also central to the day's programming. Dr. Fazi Sabi, a board-certified OB-GYN, Kaiser Permanente physician leader, and Navy veteran, joined WWP Chief Program Officer Jen Silva for a fireside chat focused on their journey, military transition, professional growth, resilience, leadership, and continued purpose after service. The conversation also provided participants an opportunity to hear directly from health care and veteran leaders about the importance of understanding women veterans' experiences and ensuring that those perspectives help inform the systems and services designed to support them.

Participants also took part in small-group breakout discussions and additional training that encouraged peer-to-peer learning and collaboration. Women warriors shared personal experiences, exchanged ideas and best practices for advocacy and leadership, and learned from one another's unique perspectives.

WOMEN WARRIORS SUMMIT (CONTINUED)



WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT WOMEN ADVOCATES MEET WITH A CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE. ATTENDEES ARE SEATED AROUND A CONFERENCE TABLE DISCUSSING POLICY PRIORITIES.

Later that afternoon, Sen. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI), introduced by WWP CEO Walt Piatt, addressed the summit participants and shared her experience in national security and public service. Sen. Slotkin spoke to participants about her journey as a woman leader in national security and public service, and as an elected official — highlighting the importance of women veterans continuing to make their voices heard.

"This was our largest Women Warriors Summit to date, bringing together more than 100 women veterans from across the country and demonstrating the continued growth of our advocacy network," **said Adam Engelman, grassroots and constituent affairs director for WWP.** "By helping women veterans build lasting relationships with lawmakers and their staff, we're strengthening engagement in communities across the country and growing a network of leaders whose voices continue to shape policy long after the summit ends."

TAKING THEIR VOICES TO CAPITOL HILL

On the final day of the summit, warriors put their training into action on Capitol Hill, meeting directly with members of Congress and congressional staff. Throughout the day, they shared their personal experiences, advanced the summit's legislative priorities, and helped policymakers better understand the challenges facing women veterans and their families.

Following their day on the Hill, participants gathered on the Capitol steps for the annual group photo before returning for the summit's closing program. Newly appointed WWP Board Director Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Dr. Telita Crosland delivered closing remarks, drawing on her own leadership journey and underscoring the importance of women veterans continuing to use their voices, experiences, and leadership to shape policy and drive change.

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL SUMMIT

Warriors left Washington energized by the connections they had built, the stories they had shared, and the impact they had made on behalf of women veterans nationwide. Armed with new skills, relationships, and experiences, they returned home prepared to continue advocating for women veterans in their communities.

"The summit is a unique opportunity for women veterans to share their stories and build personal connections with members of Congress and staff," **said Ashley Trevino, a Warrior Advocate Leader from Arkansas.** "It's so inspiring to work alongside other women warriors to create solutions to address the challenges women veterans face on a daily basis. Advocacy is a great way to give back to the veteran community."

Each year, the Women Warriors Summit underscores the importance of connection, leadership, and advocacy. As the population of women veterans continues to grow, it is more important than ever that their experiences inform policies, programs, and services intended to support them — and that their voices are heard by policymakers at every level.



LEGISLATORS OF THE YEAR

WWP Honors Leaders Who Fight for Veterans

WWP recognized Representative Mike Bost and Senator Richard Blumenthal as its 2026 Legislators of the Year. Learn how their work in Congress has advanced care, benefits, and support for veterans and their families.

Championing policies that improve the lives of veterans takes dedicated leadership. At this year's **Courage Awards & Benefit Dinner** in Washington, D.C., WWP honored Representative Mike Bost (R-IL-12) and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) as the Legislators of the Year for their outstanding efforts to improve the lives of wounded, ill, and injured veterans and Service members.

OUTSTANDING LEADER IN THE HOUSE



PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: WWP CEO LT. GEN. (RET.) WALT PIATT, REP. MIKE BOST, AND WWP SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS JOSE RAMOS

Representative Mike Bost (R-IL) is one of the most prominent veterans' advocates in Congress. He is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran and has served as Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee since 2023.

As chair, he played a critical role in passing the ***Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act*** in 2025. One of the most comprehensive veterans bills in years, this landmark legislation expanded access to home- and community-based services for elderly and disabled veterans, enhanced program support and coordination for caregivers, permanently authorized the VA VET-TEC educational assistance program, and mandated additional research on suicide prevention.

Representative Bost is a champion of the ***Major Richard Star Act*** and the ***Take Care of America's Veterans Act***, working tirelessly to reach across party lines and hear from all veterans to move these bills through Congress. In addition, his leadership on issues such as the *Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act*, the *Medal of Honor Act,* and the *No Wrong Door for Veterans Act* has given veterans and their families powerful voices in our nation's capital.

"It is a great honor to receive the Legislator of the Year award from my friends at Wounded Warrior Project," **said Representative Bost.** "But this award is not for me — it's for the hundreds of thousands of our nation's veteran and military families who have been positively impacted by the

LEGISLATORS OF THE YEAR (CONTINUED)

landmark legislation we have gotten across the finish line since the start of my chairmanship. From expanding economic and education opportunities for young families, to growing VA's mental health care network for veterans who may be struggling, to ensuring the caregivers who support our wounded warriors every single day have the resources they need, these bills have made, and will continue to make, a real difference in everyday American families' lives. I want to thank Wounded Warrior Project for the great work they do on behalf of the men and women who have served, and their families, and I look forward to seeing all that they will continue to accomplish on behalf of our entire veteran community."

OUTSTANDING LEADER IN THE SENATE



PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: WWP CEO LT. GEN. (RET.) WALT PIATT, SEN. RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, AND WWP SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS JOSE RAMOS

Senator Blumenthal has built one of the strongest veterans-focused records in the Senate. He has served on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee since 2011, and he currently serves as ranking member.

He is the most prominent champion of the *Major Richard Star Act* in the Senate, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to ensuring that combat-injured veterans receive the benefits they have earned. In addition, his consistent, bipartisan work has expanded educational support for transitioning Service members, helped secure increased benefits for disabled veterans, and strengthened care for survivors of military sexual trauma.

Senator Blumenthal supported Senate passage of the ***Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act*** of 2022. The PACT Act significantly expands VA health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances during military service, and the senator has made overseeing the bill's implementation by VA one of his top priorities.

"I am honored to receive the Legislator of the Year award from Wounded Warrior Project — fierce champions for veterans and their families across the nation. Their strong advocacy and partnership are critical in our work to make sure veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned and deserved. Together, we will continue the fight to pass the *Major Richard Star Act*, improve VA mental health care programs, and ensure a grateful nation lives up to its promises to veterans," **said Senator Blumenthal.**

> **"Both Senator Blumenthal and Representative Bost understand the promise our nation makes to those who served."**
>
> **— JOSE RAMOS**
> SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS FOR WWP

"They continue to be steadfast advocates for and allies of the veteran, combining their knowledge of veterans' issues with tireless advocacy to ensure veterans, their families, and caregivers receive the programming, support, and care they deserve and have earned," **said Ramos.** "Wounded Warrior Project is honored to recognize both as our Legislators of the Year, and we thank them for their efforts on behalf of warriors across the country."



VA UPDATES

COMMERCIAL DRIVER'S LICENSE TRAINING JUST GOT EASIER

VA has implemented a key provision of the *Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act*, a comprehensive veterans law that WWP advocated for, which was signed into law in early 2025.

The change streamlines the approval process for certain commercial driver's license (CDL) training programs, making it easier for veterans to use their VA education benefits at more training locations.

Veterans have been able to use their GI Bill benefits for CDL training since the Post-9/11 GI Bill took effect in 2009. Previously, however, a CDL school opening a new location generally had to operate at that location for at least two years before it could be approved to enroll students using GI Bill benefits — even if the school already operated an approved CDL program elsewhere.

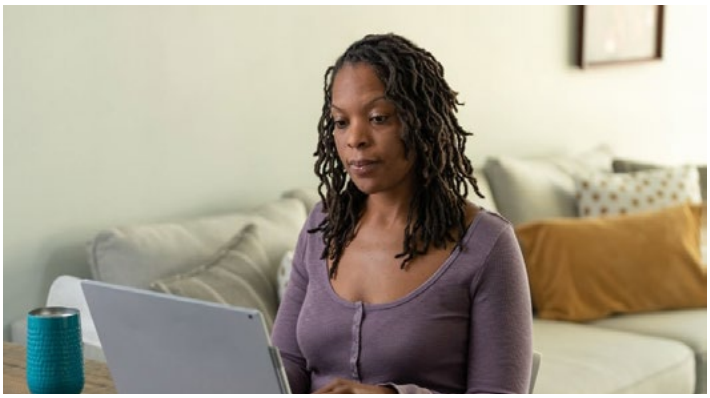
Under the updated law, qualified new CDL training locations can be exempt from that two-year waiting period. New locations using the same curriculum as an approved program in the same state may qualify for the exemption. Locations using the same curriculum as an approved program in another state may qualify after operating for at least one year.



These changes can give veterans faster access to more CDL training options, with consistent oversight and training standards.

By reducing unnecessary barriers to CDL training, the change can help veterans pursue stable, well-paid careers after military service. To learn more about these changes, visit **VA's website.**

VA'S WOMEN'S HEALTH TRANSITION TRAINING



VA's online, self-paced Women's Health Transition Training (WHTT) helps women who serve and have served understand the health care services and resources available to them.

The online course addresses health care needs and questions that can be particularly important to women veterans. Topics include:

- **Mental health services:** Understanding and accessing mental health care and support services tailored for women veterans.
- **Maternity and newborn care:** Learning about VA maternity benefits and prenatal and postnatal care.
- **Preventive care and screenings:** Understanding women-specific preventive care, including routine cancer screenings and other services that support early detection and long-term health.
- **Women-specific health care:** Learning about services including reproductive, gynecological, infertility, and other women's health care available through VA.
- **Post-service support:** Connecting with other women veterans and resources that can provide support during and after transition.
- **Whole health:** Understanding VA's approach to care that focuses on overall health and well-being.

The training is intended for women currently serving, as well as women veterans, and it can be particularly helpful for servicewomen preparing to transition from military service.

VA reported that, in fiscal year 2024, 82% of WHTT participants said the course increased their understanding of women's health services available through VA, while 75% reported greater clarity about mental health care options following military separation. Visit VA's website to learn more about Women's Health Transition Training and other resources available to women veterans.

UPDATED VA HOME LOAN APPRAISAL REQUIREMENTS



VA has updated its Minimum Property Requirements (MPRs) used in the VA home loan appraisal process. These changes are intended to reduce delays, remove outdated requirements, and help veteran homebuyers compete more effectively in today's housing market. MPRs are standards properties must meet to qualify for a VA-guaranteed home loan. VA identified several requirements that could contribute to appraisal delays or additional costs for veterans, and revised its guidance to provide greater clarity and flexibility.

Among the changes, VA has:

- Removed its separate radon gas requirement.
- Updated lead-based paint guidance for homes built before 1978.
- Clarified that defective paint on homes built in 1978 or later is generally considered cosmetic.
- Streamlined guidance related to detached improvements and Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) Regional Loan Center jurisdiction.
- Updated requirements related to heating systems, including previous guidance on non-vented heaters.

VA is also adjusting appraisal fees in select regions to help maintain a qualified pool of experienced appraisers.

For veteran and Service member homebuyers, these updates can mean fewer unnecessary appraisal hurdles and a more efficient process when purchasing a home with their VA home loan benefit. VA reported that, as of May 31, the average VA appraisal took approximately seven business days, and the department says these changes are intended to keep that timeline moving in the right direction. Visit VA's website for more about these **updates** and the **VA Home Loan Program.**

NO-COST TSA PRECHECK FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS



A policy solution WWP helped draft and champion is now delivering a new benefit to eligible veterans.

WWP worked with the original congressional sponsors and other veteran advocates to help develop the *Veterans Expedited TSA Screening (VETS) Safe Travel Act*, which was signed into law in January 2025. The law allows certain veterans with severe service-connected disabilities to enroll in TSA PreCheck at no cost, addressing challenges severely injured veterans can experience while navigating airport security with prosthetics, wheelchairs, and other mobility devices.

Veterans who may qualify for the TSA PreCheck enrollment fee waiver are those whom VA has determined as having a service-connected disability that requires the use of a VA-issued wheelchair or prosthetic limb, due to:

- ★ Loss or loss of use of an extremity.
- ★ Full or partial paralysis.
- ★ Permanent blindness.

Eligible veterans must also be enrolled in VA health care.

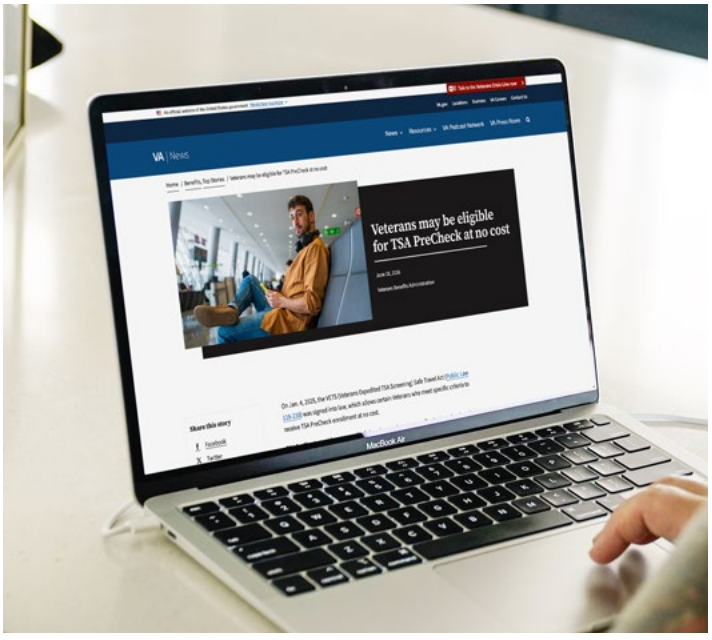
VA has sent eligible veterans a TSA PreCheck Application Fee Waiver Letter. Veterans can access the letter by following these steps:

- ★ Sign in to your **VA.gov account.** If you do not have a VA account, you can **create one** by following the online instructions.
- ★ Under the Benefits and Healthcare dropdown, select "Benefit Letters and Documents."
- ★ Select "TSA PreCheck Application Fee Waiver Letter."
- ★ Select "Download TSA PreCheck Application Fee Waiver (PDF)."
- ★ Veterans can also access **VA benefits letters** directly, and select the button to sign in or create an account.

Receiving the VA letter does not automatically guarantee free TSA PreCheck enrollment. Veterans must still meet the eligibility requirements under the *VETS Safe Travel Act*, as well as TSA's standard citizenship and security requirements, including successfully completing the required background check.

To use the benefit, visit **TSA online** for instructions on completing the TSA PreCheck enrollment process. Veterans must provide a copy of their VA fee waiver letter during enrollment.

Visit **VA's website** for more details on this benefit.





GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

Warrior-Led Forum Brings Veteran Voices Together in Spokane

Warrior Advocate Leader Lani Kelp brought together elected officials and representatives from 27 organizations for a veteran and military legislative forum in Spokane, Washington. See how he's putting grassroots advocacy into action in his community.

WWP hosted a forum at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, on October 22, bringing together more than 145 attendees, including veterans, elected officials, and representatives from 27 organizations, to discuss policy priorities impacting veterans and their families.

WWP Warrior Advocate Leader Lani Kelp organized and moderated the forum, facilitating direct dialogue between veterans and lawmakers on key federal and state legislative issues.

"The quality and nature of the relationships we build — with honest intentions, mutual respect, and a commitment to follow through — are what made this possible," **said Kelp.** "When we listen with humility, speak with courage, and keep veterans, Service members, and their families at the center, relationships become action and action becomes meaningful change."

Participants discussed several policy priorities, including WWP's top advocacy priority, the *Major Richard Star Act*, which would allow combat-injured veterans to receive both their full military retirement pay and disability compensation, and the *Veterans' ACCESS Act*, which would improve access to care for veterans living in rural communities.

"This was an outstanding gathering of veterans advocate groups at Gonzaga last week," **said U.S. Representative Michael Baumgartner.**

> **"I'm proud to sponsor and support the Major Richard Star Act. Thank you to Wounded Warrior Project for putting this together — I've never seen this many veterans in one room in my district!"**
>
> **— REPRESENTATIVE BAUMGARTNER**

The discussion reinforced a shared commitment to advancing policies that strengthen support for veterans, Service members, military families, caregivers, and survivors. It also highlighted WWP's commitment to empowering Warrior Advocate Leaders to engage policymakers, elevate veterans' voices, and drive meaningful advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels.

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