

LARSON INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE VETERAN'S ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

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Bill is in Response to Transfer of Services From Newington VA to West Haven

HARTFORD- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today announced that he has introduced legislation in the House of Representatives designed to improve access to healthcare for America's veterans. The bill, entitled the 21st Century Veterans Equitable Treatment Act (VET-21), would ensure adequate healthcare access by setting standards for appointments using the Veteran's Administration's (VA) established performance goals. If the VA is incapable of meeting these standards, Larson's legislation would allow treatment of the veteran by a non-VA medical facility for service or treatment for which they would have otherwise qualified for within the VA system.

Larson stated: "For their service to our nation, veterans were promised that they would receive not only a lifetime of healthcare services, but their own healthcare network. Enrollment in VA healthcare has more than doubled since 1995 and many veterans are experiencing unacceptable waiting periods for even routine and clinical medical appointments. This legislation will serve as a safety net to ensure uninterrupted and adequate healthcare services for veterans. It considers first and foremost the immediate needs of individual veterans without undermining existing VA services or facilities. America's veterans have performed an extraordinary service to our nation, and have made incredible sacrifices. The federal government has an obligation to live up to its promises and give our veterans the full measure of healthcare access they deserve," said Larson.

To expedite reimbursements for services and reduce the need for complicated paperwork, VET-21 would recommend that the VA Secretary take advantage of tools such as "Smart Card" technology, that would allow claims, including those for emergency service, to be processed electronically. The legislation would also remove the requirement that for non-VA emergency services, a veteran must have seen a VA doctor within the last 24 months and would include a standard for assessing improvement in appointment waiting times. The bill also directs the Secretary to submit quarterly reports on the reduction in waiting times and appointment delays in the system to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

The legislation is based on concerns voiced at a forum held in Newington with local veterans in February of this year to discuss the VA New England regional budget deficit and the movement of specialty care services from the Newington VA facility to the West Haven facility.

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