



## 2024 Interim Legislative Session

In the last Chapter newsletter, I mentioned that I would attend the Texas Senate Veterans Committee meeting. I'm happy I did because it turned out to be the only committee meeting planned for the Interim session. You can find the minutes for that meeting here -

<https://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/88R/minutes/pdf/C6502024051509001.PDF>

Additionally, you can link to the archived video using the QR code below and read my notes from the meeting.



## Senate Veteran Affairs Committee Meeting

May 15, 2024

| Senator       | Issue  | Comments   |
|---------------|--|--|
| Sen. Hancock  | Micro look at what processes are not working<br>Mental Health & Technology<br>Veterans Housing | Example: Macro is \$\$\$; Micro is Customer Svc. Have you asked Veterans what they need? Where do children learn about suicide;TiK Tok? Texts? What about separate Housing for women Veterans; can you use AI to assist in suicide prevention; address MST during active duty service. |
| Sen. Parker   | Veterans Services  | How does the relationship between the TVC & VA work for benefits & services; pushback on poor VA services.   |
| Sen. Blanco   | Mental Health<br>Stand-alone facilities for Women Vets<br>w/wraparound services                | Lack of Access in Rural Areas; Counseling Compact; Scale up services for MST   |
| Sen. Bob Hall |  | Data is good, outcomes are key   |
| Sen. Sparks   | Veteran Services   | Need Better integration of TVC – VA – Non-profits  |

After I finish this newsletter input, I'll start preparing for the Texas House Defense Affairs and Veterans committee meetings on Aug 20 (in Austin) and on Aug 21 in San Antonio. As you can see from the committee scheduling notices (at the two links below), the representatives will cover the charges issued to them by the House Speaker earlier this year.

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/schedules/html/C3052024082010001.HTM>

<https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/schedules/html/C3052024082110001.HTM>

## 2024 House Interim Charges - Veterans

1. **Monitoring:** Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 88th Legislature.

Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure the intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

- HB 90, relating to benefits for certain members of the Texas military forces and survivors of members of the Texas military forces; and
- HB 671, relating to a Veterans' suicide prevention campaign.

2. **Identification and Support of Texas Veterans:** Identify barriers to identifying and verification of veteran status. Make recommendations to improve identification efforts to better engage and support the state's veteran populations.

3. **Professional License Portability for Military and Spouses:** Evaluate compliance statewide with the Section 19 of the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 (P.L. 117333, 50 U.S.C. §4025a), concerning the portability of professional licenses of service members and spouses and make recommendations to ensure that service members and their spouses may, under appropriate circumstances, continue to practice under a license issued by another jurisdiction.

4. **Strength of Texas Military Bases:** Review the federal criteria for considering and recommending base closure or realignment and evaluate the strength of Texas Military Bases under the scoring system utilized by the U.S. Department of Defense. Make recommendations to mitigate the risk of realignments or closures of military installations in Texas.

I am particularly interested in hearing about the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Mental Health Department's plans for a new Veterans' Suicide Prevention Campaign that the Legislature required them to put together during the 2023 Legislative Session. Veteran mental health issues are not effectively coordinated on a state-wide basis. Perhaps this "opportunity" directed by the Legislature will turn the tide and encourage better collaboration and innovation throughout Texas.



### **More Continuing Resolutions in our Future?**

We have less than 3 months until national elections and about 45 days left in the Government Fiscal Year. Neither the House nor the Senate has passed all the individual appropriation bills needed to fund operations beginning on 1 November. We can only hope and pray that the September and 2025 federal fiscal year (FY25) funding legislation will be prioritized when Congress returns in early September after the August recess.

## MOAA's 2024 Summer Advocacy Campaign

It's that time of year when a few minutes of your time can have a large collective impact on fellow retirees, Veterans and those who are still serving. With all the noise surrounding election year politics, we need to remind our elected representatives that

they have a duty to support a strong defense and keep the promises made to those who have honorably served our country.

These are the Key MOAA advocacy priorities for this summer advocacy program:

- **Junior Enlisted Pay Raise:** Competitive pay remains critical to the health of the all-volunteer force, and both the House and the Senate seek to address this issue in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The House NDAA calls for servicemembers E-1 to E-4 to receive a 15% pay raise beyond the 4.5% earmarked for all in uniform. While the Senate version calls for an additional 1% increase for servicemembers E-1 to E-3 (beyond the 4.5% raise).
- **Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) Restoration:** Access to quality housing and promoting financial wellness are important to sustaining the all-volunteer force. Restoring BAH addresses both issues. The House version of the NDAA would restore BAH to 100% for FY 2025 – a move toward MOAA’s goal of full repeal of the BAH reduction, but not a permanent fix. Unfortunately, the Senate version does not address the issue.
- **Major Richard Star Act:** Tens of thousands of combat-injured veterans lose a dollar of earned DoD retirement pay for every dollar of VA disability compensation. For three years in a row, over two-thirds of Congress has supported the Star Act, which would end that unjust financial offset. Despite this vast support, neither version of the NDAA includes the bill. However, it is critical lawmakers continue to hear about this important issue, especially as we approach the start of the 119th Congress.

Do your part, Take Action NOW and Don’t forget to select TX 31 as your MOAA chapter.

<https://moaa.quorum.us/campaign/65997/>