

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CHAIRMAN MIKE BOST

H.R. 754: The Modernizing Veterans' Healthcare Eligibility Act

Background:

There are currently about 19 million veterans in the United States. Approximately 9 million of those veterans are enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system and a little over 7 million of them actively use the VA healthcare system regularly. A veteran's eligibility to enroll in the VA healthcare system is governed by eight enrollment priority groups. Those priority groups were created by Congress in the *Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996 [Public Law No: 104-262]* to prioritize VA care for veterans with service-connected conditions and veterans whose income is below certain income thresholds. Congress has acted intermittently since then to provide limited eligibility to certain other groups of veterans (most recently for example, combat era veterans). However, there has been no comprehensive changes to the priority group system since 1996. In 2015, the bipartisan Commission on Care noted that "substantial changes have occurred since Congress last comprehensively examined eligibility for [VA] care" and recommended that an expert panel be convened to examine eligibility structure and recommend changes.

The Modernizing Veterans' Healthcare Eligibility Act would create a bipartisan commission to assess veterans' eligibility for care within VA and make recommendations for how such eligibility determinations could be revised and simplified for the next generation of veterans. VA would be required to implement those recommendations made by the commission that VA deems appropriate, and to determine which actions would require legislation from Congress. The commission would be fully bipartisan and comprised of 15 commissioners appointed by the President, the Majority and Minority Leaders of the Senate, and the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House of Representatives. At least 6 commissioners would be veterans themselves, while others would be experts in the delivery of care in VA, in the federal government, and in the private sector.

The Message:

- It's been a quarter century since Congress created the current VA healthcare eligibility system.
- Today and tomorrow's veterans deserve a VA healthcare system that is designed to meet their needs.
- *The Modernizing Veterans' Healthcare Eligibility Act* would create a bipartisan panel of veterans and healthcare industry experts to recommend how veteran eligibility to enroll in the VA healthcare system could be updated, simplified, and improved to make sure that all those who have served receive the earned care they have earned.