



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Republicans | Ranking Member Phil Roe, M.D.

H.R. 7728: COVID-19 Benefits for Active Duty Servicemembers, the Reserve Components, and their Survivors Act of 2020

Background:

Generally, veterans and/or their surviving family members must prove that their disability or death is directly related to their military service – or service connected - in order to qualify for disability compensation or survivor benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Establishing service connection could be particularly difficult for the thousands of active duty, National Guard, and Reserve servicemembers serving during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, due to the extensive community spread of the virus and lack of accessible testing. This could leave those individuals serving on the frontlines of the fight against the novel coronavirus particularly vulnerable to its effects and their families without needed support in the event of their loved one's death or serious disability.

The COVID-19 Benefits for Active Duty Servicemembers, the Reserve Components, and their Survivors Act of 2020 would solve that by creating a time-limited presumption of entitlement to service connection for active duty, National Guard and Reserve servicemembers if they develop symptoms of COVID-19 during or within 14-days after a qualifying period of military service. This would ensure that these veterans are able to receive the VA benefits they are entitled to without first having to prove service connection, and that their families are able to access VA survivor benefits in the event of their death. The bill would also eliminate the requirement that a disability occur within the line of duty for certain members of the National Guard and Reserve. It would further ensure that those individuals can access VA benefits if they develop symptoms of COVID-19 after their federal orders have ended, which is necessary given the long incubation period COVID-19 can entail.

The Message:

- The active duty servicemembers, National Guard members, and Reservists fighting against COVID-19 put themselves in harm's way to help heal our country from the devastating effects of the pandemic.
- We owe it to these brave men and women to ensure that they have ready access to VA benefits in the event they contract COVID-19 during their service.
- This bill would remove barriers to VA disability compensation and survivor benefits in the event a veteran, Reservist, or Guard Member was exposed to COVID-19 while on active duty or federal orders and suffers a life-long disability or death as a result.