



Ranking Member Mike Braun's Opening Statement
"Heroes at Home: Improving Services for Veterans and their Caregivers"

American Veterans represent the absolute best our country has to offer, and they deserve the absolute best when they return home.

Of our country's 16.5 million Veterans, nearly half are 65 years or older and 3.2 million have a disability rating over 30%.

Given these dynamics, it is essential that we improve how we are caring for our aging and disabled veterans.

Historically, State Veterans Homes were the only option for aging and disabled Veterans in need of skilled nursing care.

Now, we have built a robust infrastructure of 165 facilities across all 50 states by working in partnership with states.

However, increasingly both older and younger Veterans want to remain in their homes while receiving care, often from their families.

When younger post-9/11 Veterans returned home wounded but not fully in need of traditional institutional care, Congress had to reevaluate its care options.

Congress established the VA Caregiver Support Programs (CSPs) to better meet the emerging needs of this new era of Veterans.

These programs provide family caregivers with a menu of services from education to respite care.

Since 2011, the VA CSPs have helped relieve stress for tens of thousands of wounded Veterans and their caregivers.

In 2020, the VA published a rule that tightened eligibility requirements for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

This resulted in many participants being kicked off the program and no longer receiving critical caregiver support.

I joined Senator Tester in introducing the *CARE Act* (S.1792), which pushes back on VA while improving operation and oversight of the Caregivers Program.

I was pleased to see that our bill was included in the bipartisan Veteran's package currently making its way through the House.

This isn't the only improvement Congress can make to the VA Caregiver Support Programs.

As we are facing critical shortages in the caregiving workforce, Congress and the VA must ensure Veterans have access to consistent and reliable respite options.

One way we can do this is by leveraging the existing resource available in our State Veterans Homes.

Veterans should be able to use their respite hours to access services including in-home paid caregivers and State Veterans Homes Adult Day Health Centers.

These health centers provide more robust services for Veterans than traditional independent adult day cares and State Veterans Homes are well-positioned to scale them quickly if given the flexibility to do so.

By reinstating the State Veterans Homes construction flexibilities and allowing them to open satellite locations at existing medical and long-term care facilities, Congress can swiftly and efficiently address the respite needs of Veterans and their caregivers.

I am committed to working with the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs to reinstate those flexibilities and ensure all Veterans have access to high-quality respite care.

I look forward to the discussion and insights our panelists bring today.