

**Written Testimony of Jack Waldorf, Executive Director
Western Governors' Association**

**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
May 15, 2026**

Fiscal Year 2027 Appropriations

Chair Boozman, Ranking Member Ossoff, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on the appropriations and activities of the federal agencies under the Subcommittee's jurisdiction, including the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and territories. It is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information sharing, and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

With one-third of the known veteran population residing in western states, the overall well-being of veterans is important to Western Governors. Their collective, bipartisan policy emphasizes the importance of focusing on mental health care and suicide prevention for veterans. Additionally, it points out the need to ensure veterans can readily understand their entitled benefits, particularly by enhancing support for recognized Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs). Western Governors also recognize the essential function of VSOs in helping veterans navigate VA's claims and benefits system. Western Governors appreciate the Subcommittee's past support for VSOs and recommend the Subcommittee provide sufficient funding to offset the costs of training and to enhance the workforce capacity of VSOs to bolster their ability to serve our nation's veterans.

Western Governors emphasize the urgent need for veterans to have timely access to high-quality health care. To that end, the Governors recommend the Subcommittee prioritize the resources needed for VA to effectively recruit, train, and retain healthcare professionals like physicians, nurses, and mental health specialists. Additionally, acknowledging the crucial role of third-party providers in VA's long-term care programs, the Governors recommend that the Subcommittee provide adequate funding to enhance assisted living and comprehensive care programs for veterans.

Additional detail on these and other issues in the purview of the Subcommittee can be found in WGA Policy Resolution 2023-08, Veterans, which conveys Western Governors' collective policy on these issues.

It is an enormous challenge to judiciously balance competing needs and Western Governors appreciate the difficulty of the decisions this Subcommittee must make. The foregoing recommendations are offered in a spirit of cooperation and respect, and WGA is prepared to assist you with efforts to improve our services to veterans.