

AFL-CIO

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

June 22, 2026

Dear Representative:

We, the undersigned labor unions representing hundreds of thousands of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees—as well as millions of veterans, many of whom receive their healthcare and benefits from the VA—stand united in our strong opposition to S. 4744 / H.R. 9237, the “Take Care of America’s Veterans Act.” This legislation cynically packages long-sought, well-deserved new benefits for disabled veterans with benefit cuts to other veterans and a slew of provisions designed to further privatize the VA healthcare system.

Specifically, this bill includes provisions from S. 1032 / H.R. 2102, the “Major Richard Star Act.” The Star Act is a widely popular, bipartisan bill (boasting 78 Senate co-sponsors and 336 House co-sponsors) that would allow medically retired, combat-injured veterans to receive full military retirement pay along with VA disability compensation. However, the “Take Care of America’s Veterans Act” would eliminate or reduce critical disability benefits for sleep apnea and tinnitus to serve as a financial offset for the “Major Richard Star Act.” According to official VA analysis, this provision will strip or reduce benefits for up to **1.5 million veterans**, slashing future disability payments by **\$57 billion over the next 10 years** and drawing opposition from the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and other major Veteran Service Organizations. Veterans' benefit improvements should not be held hostage to reciprocal cuts and privatization.

Furthermore, this bill accelerates the privatization of VA medical services, which directly threatens direct-care funding and risks triggering a downward spiral within the VA’s internal healthcare system. Approximately half of all VA-funded medical care is already provided by external, non-VA vendors. Private community care expenditures have skyrocketed from \$14.9 billion in 2018 to \$28.5 billion in 2023, reaching an unsustainable \$34 billion in FY 2026.

Of particular concern are sections that would:

- **Codify Flawed Access Standards:** The bill would put into law rules that mandate private care referrals if the VA cannot meet arbitrary drive-time and wait-time standards. Community providers face no reciprocal requirements to meet these time and distance thresholds. Codifying these rules would legally lock them in place for eight years, continually funneling vital resources out of the VA.
- **Bypass VA Care Coordination:** The bill expands the mechanisms by which veterans and private physicians can bypass VA authorization to access community care. This severely undermines the VA’s capability to coordinate complex treatment plans and monitor the quality of patient care.

- **Circumvent Preauthorization for Mental Health:** It establishes a three-year pilot program providing direct grants to private, non-profit mental health organizations, entirely bypassing crucial VA clinical referral and preauthorization processes.
- **Over-Automate Benefits Processing:** It expands automated decision tools within the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), risking errors and delays in claims processing.
- **Undermine existing RIF Protections:** It creates a new Reduction in Force (RIF) notification process without language ensuring that existing collective bargaining rights, negotiated agreement provisions, or applicable title 5 and title 38 employee protections will not be limited in any way.

Beyond dismantling the VA's healthcare infrastructure, the bill takes direct aim at the frontline workers who care for our nation's heroes. It includes a provision moving thousands of VA psychologists from Hybrid Title 38 status (38 U.S.C. § 7401(3)) to Full Title 38 status (38 U.S.C. § 7401(1)). This change strips psychologists of their Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) appeal rights and subjects them to 38 U.S.C. § 7422, heavily restricting their collective bargaining rights.

We urge Congress to reject this omnibus legislation and instead pass the standalone, bipartisan “Major Richard Star Act” (S. 1032 / H.R. 2102) without the poison pill benefit cuts and corporate privatization measures attached to S. 4744 / H.R. 9237.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
 American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), AFL-CIO
 American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
 Association of Flight Attendants-CWA
 Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE)
 International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM Union)
 International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)
 International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC)
 Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA)
 Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO
 National Association of Government Employees (NAGE-SEIU)
 National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE-IAM)
 National Nurses United (NNU)
 National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)
 National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU)
 National Weather Service Employees Organization (NWSEO)
 Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO (PASS)
 Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
 Union Veterans Council (UVC), AFL-CIO
 United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry
 United Auto Workers (UAW)
 United Steelworkers International Union (USW)
 Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA), AFL-CIO