

Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act

The objective of the *CVSO Act* is to expand community-based outreach to help veterans access benefits and support services.

Background:

Out of the estimated 19 million veterans in the United States, only a small fraction utilize the care and benefits they've earned from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA statistics show that as of FY20, about 9 million veterans were enrolled in the VA Health Care system, 5 million were receiving disability compensation and 3 million were active VA home loan participants—with other VA programs showing similar rates of underutilization. Indeed, veterans do not always know of the benefits available to them, and it's especially important to make veterans aware of their health care benefits as those treated in the VA system are significantly less likely to complete the act of suicide than veterans outside the system.

County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) are local county employees who are nationally accredited by the VA to prepare, present, and prosecute VA claims; and are often the first to inform veterans about their eligibility for VA programs and services. They also help enroll veterans into the Veterans Health Administration and provide assistance on a range of benefits, including service-connected disability compensation, VA home loans, education benefits, and job placement assistance.

Additionally, CVSOs perform much of the VA's legwork for filing claims in their regions with a modest number of approximately 1,700 accredited representatives throughout 36 states and two Native American Tribes. These employees are responsible for successfully processing more than \$42 billion in claims annually for direct compensation and pension benefits for veterans. If healthcare and ancillary benefits are included, that number rises to more than \$85 billion. States without CVSOs will also benefit from this legislation because it allows the Secretary to partner with comparable state, local or tribal entities, including Tribal Veterans Service Officers.

The Solution:

The *CVSO Act* will authorize \$50 million annually for five years to expand and support CVSOs or similar local entities. The Department of Veterans Affairs will award competitive grants to states in order to improve outreach to veterans and enhance the ability of states to develop and submit claims on behalf of veterans, and to increase the number of county or tribal veteran's service officers serving in the state by hiring new officers. States will be required to submit an application containing a detailed plan for the use of these funds, and the Secretary will develop guidance for outcome measures to determine the effectiveness of the programs. Lastly, states must show that that these federal funds do not simply supplant current state or local funding. By increasing the number of CVSOs, states will be better able to leverage their local and federal resources to serve our veterans.

Cosponsors:

Senators Baldwin and Sullivan

Support:

The legislation is currently supported by the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers (NACVSO), the Wisconsin and Alaska Departments of Veterans Affairs, the Wisconsin State Association of County Veterans Service Commissions and Committees (WSACVSC), the Wisconsin Association of Counties, the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA), and multiple individual CVSOs and local officials in Wisconsin and Alaska.