

# Warner & Kaine Statement on senate passage of bipartisan bill to expand benefits for toxic-exposed veterans

Washington, D.C. — In June, U.S. Senators Mark R. Warner and Tim Kaine applauded Senate passage of the bipartisan Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022, legislation that will expand health care and resources for toxic-exposed veterans under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and authorize a new community-based outpatient clinic in Hampton Roads.

“Our nation’s veterans have sacrificed so much while serving in the Armed Forces, and we owe it to them to ensure they have access to the benefits they’ve earned,” said the Senators. “We’re glad the Senate passed this bipartisan legislation to expand health care for millions of veterans across generations of service, who were exposed to toxins and burn pits. We’re also thrilled that this bill will authorize and provide funding for another outpatient clinic in Hampton Roads, helping reduce wait times and increase access to timely care for the region’s growing military community.”

The bill is named in honor of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, who died in 2020 from toxic exposure as a result of his military service in Kosovo and Iraq with the Ohio National Guard.

Specifically, the PACT Act will:

- Expand VA health care to more than 3.5 million toxic-exposed post-9/11 combat veterans;
- Create a framework for the establishment of future presumptions of service connection related to toxic exposure;
- Add 23 burn pit and toxic exposure-related conditions to VA’s

list of service presumptions, including hypertension;

- Expand presumptions related to Agent Orange exposure and include Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll as locations for Agent Orange exposure;
- Strengthen federal research on toxic exposure;
- Improve VA’s resources and training for toxic-exposed veterans; and
- Set VA and veterans up for success by investing in VA claims processing, VA’s workforce, and VA health care facilities.
- Authorize 31 major medical facility leases and allocates \$5.5 billion to fund those facilities – including a new outpatient clinic in Hampton Roads.

The bill now heads to the House of Representatives for a vote. The House already passed similar legislation led by Representative Mark Takano in March 2022.

Warner and Kaine have long supported expanding health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxins and burn pits during their service. The Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which Warner and Kaine voted to pass, included provisions to expand the VA’s list of medical conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure. Warner and Kaine also cosponsored legislation that was signed into law in 2019 to extend VA coverage to veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange while stationed off the coast of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. The bill also extended these

benefits to service members exposed to herbicides while serving in the Korean Demilitarized Zone and to children of servicemembers stationed in Thailand who were born with spina bifida. Virginia is home to more than 700,000 veterans.

During his time in the Senate, Warner has advocated improving care for Virginia’s veterans. In 2015, confronted with wait times in Hampton Roads that were three times the national average, Warner successfully urged the VA to send down a team of experts to address the problem. He also succeeded in getting the Northern Virginia Technology Council to issue a free report detailing how to reduce wait times. Most recently, in October 2020, Warner successfully saw through the signing of his legislation to expand veterans’ access to mental health services and reduce the alarming rate of veteran suicide. He’s also previously met with senior leadership at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center and Hampton VA Medical Center to discuss wait time reduction at their facilities and suicide prevention efforts.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), Kaine has introduced the bipartisan Vet Support Act to provide better identification, intervention, and care to veterans coping with mental health issues in underserved areas. He also cosponsored legislation to allow doctors at the VA to prescribe medical marijuana to veterans in states that have established medical marijuana programs, like Virginia has already done.