

# U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Introduces bipartisan legislation to help veterans access earned benefits

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*WASHINGTON, D.C.* — Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Dan Sullivan (R-AK) introduced the Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act to expand a community-based outreach program that helps veterans learn about and access their earned benefits. The legislation would expand and support County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO), the community-based employees who work directly with veterans to inform them of eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs and services, file pension and compensation claims, and help them enroll in job, housing, disability, and education benefits. CVSOs play an outsized role in helping veterans in rural, native, and other hard-to-reach communities connect with VA services.

Out of the estimated 19 million veterans in the United States, only a small fraction utilize the care and benefits they are entitled to. As of 2020, nine million veterans were enrolled in the VA Health Care System, five million were receiving disability compensation, and three million were active VA home loan participants.

“We have a commitment to do right by the troops who defended our country, and that includes helping them get the benefits and support that they have earned,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “Unfortunately, too many veterans do not, or are not able, to access the health care and support services they have worked for, particularly those in our rural and Native communities. This bipartisan legislation will help reach our veterans where they are and connect them with local advocates to get the benefits and support that they are owed.”

“Less than half of Alaska’s more than 75,000 veterans are currently enrolled in the

VA system, meaning a majority are not accessing the benefits and health care services that they have earned, including those struggling with mental illness. That is unacceptable,” **said Senator Sullivan.** “Alaska’s vast size and sparse population certainly contribute to this challenge, but local partners and veteran service officers present an opportunity to reach these off-the-grid veterans. Senator Baldwin and I are introducing legislation that will reinforce the VA’s mission to expand its reach and ensure veterans who live in rural, frontier states—like Alaska—do not get left behind.”

Specifically, the legislation would authorize \$50 million annually for five years to hire more CVSOs and support current officers or similar local entities through a competitive grant program. By increasing the number of CVSOs, states will also be better able to leverage their local and federal resources to serve our veterans.

“This act would benefit CVSOs as most offices are working on a shoestring budget,” **said Ali Nelson, President of the County Veterans Service Officers of Wisconsin.** “Additional funding would help us to do more outreach to Veterans, especially regarding the new benefits and eligibility resulting from the PACT Act.”

The legislation is supported by the National Association of Counties, the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers, the Wisconsin and Alaska Departments of Veterans Affairs, the Wisconsin State Association of County Veterans Service Commissions and Committees, the Wisconsin Association of Counties, and the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs.

A one pager on the legislation is available [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).