



FIGHTING FOR FLORIDA'S VETERANS

VETERANS DAY 2024 UPDATE



RICK SCOTT
FLORIDA'S U.S. SENATOR

A MESSAGE FROM SENATOR RICK SCOTT

Dear Friend:

As a Navy veteran myself and the son of a World War II veteran, I know firsthand the sacrifices our veterans, servicemembers and their families make to defend our freedom. Veterans of our Armed Forces truly represent the best of what it means to be an American and a Floridian. I think about my adopted dad, Orba. He had a sixth-grade education, joined the Army as a teenager, fought in the Battle of the Bulge and did all four combat jumps in World War II with the 82nd Airborne. He didn't talk about his service often, but he was so proud to be in the U.S. Army and proud to put on our nation's colors and defend our freedoms.

None of the opportunities and freedoms we have as Americans would be possible without the dedicated service of our brave men and women in uniform and their families.

That's why, throughout my time as Governor of Florida, I made it my mission to turn our state into the most military and veteran-friendly state in the nation by championing important legislation and funding to support priorities that matter most to Florida's military and veteran families. Fighting for our heroes continues to be one of my top priorities as a U.S. Senator and a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. I will always do everything I can to support our veterans and their families so they can succeed and pursue their American dreams.

To those who have served, THANK YOU. May God bless you and your families, and may God bless America.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator

MEET RICK SCOTT

Since joining the U.S. Senate in 2019, Senator Rick Scott has been a proud member of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), which oversees all matters related to the United States Armed Forces. In 2023, he was named Ranking Member of the SASC Personnel Subcommittee for the 118th Congress. In this role, Senator Scott is responsible for overseeing crucial issues like military personnel policies, Department of Defense civilian personnel, end strengths for military personnel, compensation and benefits, healthcare, and military nominations.

One of Senator Scott's top priorities is ensuring that our service members are supported not just during their time in uniform, but also when they transition to civilian life. Caring for our veterans and providing them with the highest quality of care is a fundamental duty.

The sacrifice made by those who serve in the world's greatest military is immeasurable, and any legislation considered by Congress must reflect that. Senator Scott remains committed to ensuring that all decisions affecting our veterans are made with the best interests of them and their families at heart.

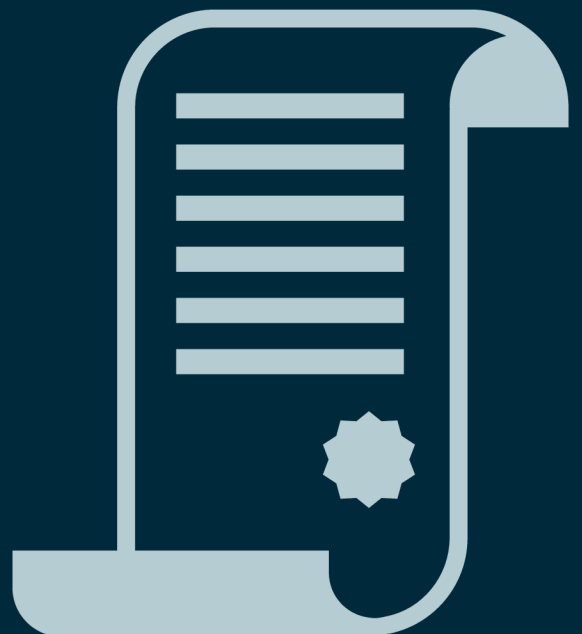
This booklet outlines some of the key proposals Senator Scott has supported that have been signed into law, as well as ongoing efforts he continues to champion. At the end, you'll also find information on resources available to our veterans.

1,430,000+
VETERANS IN
FLORIDA



101,000+
FLORIDA PACT
ACT RELATED
CLAIMS SINCE
AUG. 2022

185+
VETERANS
RELATED PIECES
OF LEGISLATION
BECAME LAW



CURRENT LEGISLATION

Senator Scott is always working to make the entire federal government, more efficient and work for the American people.

Through advocacy, outreach, and casework, issues arise that highlight the need for increased oversight and Congressional action. The following bills are either sponsored or co-sponsored by Senator Scott during the 118th Congress.

Veterans Accessibility Act of 2023

Veterans with disabilities have a right to equal access to programs, services and information at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Yet, recent Congressional oversight found that the VA has failed to consistently make its websites, kiosks, and other technology accessible for people with disabilities, as required by law. Over 60 million adults in the United States have a disability, including over one-quarter of our Nation's veterans. Older adults are more likely to develop a disability, including more than 8 million veterans age 65 or older. Older adults are a rapidly growing segment of America's population, making accessibility essential for maintaining access to programs and benefits. This legislation provides veterans and people with disabilities a voice to improve accessibility at the VA, so no one is left behind.

The *Veterans Accessibility Act of 2023* will establish a Veterans Advisory Committee on Equal Access at the VA. The advisory committee will issue regular reports on VA's compliance with federal disability laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act. The reports will include recommendations for improving VA's compliance. They will be shared with Congress, the public, and agencies that oversee the Nation's disability laws. Veterans with disabilities will be among the advisory committee's members, ensuring their voices are heard.

SCHEDULES Act of 2024

The *Scheduling for Community Health and Easy Data to Understand for Legislators to Evaluate Services (SCHEDULES) Act of 2024* directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish an overall timeliness standard from when a consult is done and a veteran's appointment actually happens. It also requires a quarterly report on the percentage of referrals to providers in the community and appointments at VHA facilities that meet the set standards. Millions rely on the VA, and our VA providers must be accountable and responsive in delivering essential, and often life-saving, health care. This bill will increase transparency within the VA by requiring uniform standards across the board so veterans have more insight into when their appointments will be scheduled. As a Navy veteran myself and the son of a WWII veteran, I know that our veterans have sacrificed so much for our freedoms, and they should never be forced to play a guessing game of when they will be taken care of.

Major Richard Star Act

Current law requires a dollar-for-dollar offset of these two benefits, meaning they have to forfeit a portion of the benefits they earned in service. It is time to fully honor veterans who were medically retired as a result of injuries incurred in combat or combat-related training. Regardless of time in service, these veterans have earned all their benefits through their extraordinary sacrifice in defending our nation.

The *Major Richard Star Act* is a step in the right direction for providing benefits for those who have earned them.

Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act

This legislation would expand community-based services for aging veterans as well as improve VA support for veterans and caregivers of all ages.

The *Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act* exemplifies former Sen. Elizabeth Dole's passion for supporting veterans and their caregivers by expanding access to home and community-based care programs for veterans, increasing support for noninstitutional care, assessing VA's caregiver and long-term care programs and more.

U.S.-Israel PTSD Collaborative Research Act

The U.S.-Israel PTSD Collaborative Research Act would allow the Department of Defense (DoD) to create partnerships through the Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program with American and Israeli institutions aimed at advancing PTSD research while establishing a grant program to fund the collaborative research conducted through these partnerships.

Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act

The *Preventing Crimes Against Veterans Act* establishes a new federal criminal offense for knowingly executing, or attempting to execute, a scheme to defraud an individual of veterans' benefits, or in connection with obtaining veteran's benefits for an individual. A violator is subject to criminal penalties—a fine, a prison term of up to five years, or both.

Veterans Homecare Choice Act of 2023

Access to labor for homecare services has been in decline. In response to that, this bill reinstates veterans' access to home care professionals operating as independent contractors by making any nurse registry eligible for the Community Care Network - expanding access to include more providers for at-home care.

The Services Dogs Assisting Veterans (SAVES) Act

The *Service Dogs Assisting Veterans Act* (SAVES Act) directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to create a grant program supporting nonprofit organizations that provide service dogs to eligible veterans. Nonprofits must apply competitively and meet criteria such as offering dog training, veteran training, aftercare, and humane standards for animals. The grants, capped at \$2 million per organization, ensure equal access to service dogs for female veterans and must be used to establish or operate programs. Eligible veterans include those with disabilities such as visual impairments, mobility issues, PTSD, or traumatic brain injury.

Ensuring Continuity in Veterans Health Act

This bill requires the consideration of continuity of health care in determining the best medical interest under the Veterans Community Care Program. I've heard from veterans in Florida about how important it is for them to continue seeing their community care providers, and this bill will ensure they can do so. This is a simple change that can make a massive difference in the lives of our veterans. I'm proud to join my colleagues in introducing the Ensuring Continuity in Veterans Health Act and look forward to it becoming law.

TAP Promotion Act

The *TAP Promotion Act* aims to enhance the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for military members by including a standardized presentation on veterans' benefits, as administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This presentation must be reviewed and approved by the VA in collaboration with veterans service organizations and submitted to Congress 90 days prior to implementation. It must involve veterans service organization representatives where possible and provide information on claims assistance without promoting specific organizations. The presentation is capped at one hour. Additionally, the VA must submit an annual report to Congress on the participation and attendance of service organizations, along with recommendations for improvements.

Supporting Economic Opportunity of Veterans

This legislation establishes the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration to administer economic opportunity assistance programs for veterans and their dependents and survivors.

Specifically, the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration must administer the following Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs:

- vocational rehabilitation and employment programs,
- educational assistance programs,
- veterans' housing loan and related programs,
- the Transition Assistance Program, and
- the database of small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans.

Prior to the transfer of administrative responsibilities, the bill requires the VA to certify that (1) the transition of the provision of services will not negatively affect the provision of such services to veterans, and (2) such services are ready to be transferred.

VICTORIES

Below you will find important veterans bills that Senator Rick Scott supported that are now the law of the land.

Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022

The PACT Act is the most significant expansion of benefits and services for toxic-exposed veterans in more than 30 years. This law adds to the list of health conditions that are assumed or “presumed” to be caused by exposure to these substances, which helps provide generations of veterans and their survivors with the care and benefits they have earned and deserve. This law is perhaps the largest health care and benefit expansion in VA history.

The PACT Act provides the VA with mechanisms to enhance claims processing and to increase the workforce. Veterans and survivors can file claims for all conditions in the PACT Act immediately and the law covers all presumptive conditions. A presumptive condition is an illness that is assumed or presumed to be caused by a veteran’s service, and the PACT Act includes new diagnoses and an expanded list of respiratory conditions and cancers. The law covers veterans from Vietnam through Iraq and Afghanistan, and it addresses a broad spectrum of toxic exposures.

The PACT Act is the result of a unified call to strengthen health care and benefits for America’s veterans and their survivors by comprehensively addressing toxic exposures that have impacted veterans, as well as their families and caregivers.

While some ailments caused by toxic exposure can present quickly, others can take years to manifest, which left many veterans outside their eligibility window to enroll in VA health care. The PACT Act helps address this issue by expanding care and benefits to veterans and their survivors who were exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances.

Faster Payments to Veterans' Survivors Act of 2022

This act is designed to expedite and streamline the process of disbursing payments to the survivors of deceased veterans. Its primary aim is to reduce bureaucratic delays and administrative obstacles that have historically slowed down the distribution of benefits to veterans' surviving family members. By facilitating faster payments, this act seeks to ensure that survivors receive the financial support they are entitled to in a more timely and efficient manner.

Improving Access to the VA Home Loan Benefit Act of 2022

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to update regulations, requirements, and guidance related to appraisals for housing loans guaranteed by the VA.

Specifically, such regulations or requirements must specify when an appraisal is required, how an appraisal is to be conducted, and who is eligible to conduct an appraisal for such loans. The act also requires the VA to submit to Congress recommendations for improving the delivery times for appraisals for VA loans and to take such recommendations into consideration in prescribing its updated regulations or requirements.

The VA must also provide additional guidance for desktop appraisals, which are performed remotely using information gathered by third parties with whom a VA-approved appraiser has entered into an agreement for such appraisal. In updating such guidance, the VA must specifically take into account situations where (1) desktop appraisals provide cost savings for borrowers, and (2) a traditional appraisal requirement could cause time delays and jeopardize the completion of a transaction.

VICTORIES

Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to consult with the Department of Defense to identify and refer members of the Armed Forces with health care occupations for employment with the VA during their separation from the Armed Forces.

The VA must refer interested members to a recruiter for consideration of open positions in the member's specialty and geography of interest. Referrals must not be made earlier than one year before the member's separation from the Armed Forces.

Patient Advocate Tracker Act

This act creates an online portal where veterans can electronically file and track the status of complaints they file with the VA.

SVAC Act of 2022

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to seek to enter into an agreement with a federally funded research and development center to provide a cybersecurity assessment of five high-impact VA information systems and the effectiveness of the VA's information security program and information security management system.

The VA must submit a plan to Congress to address the findings of the assessment.

The Government Accountability Office must review the assessment and the VA's response to the assessment and report its findings to Congress.

VICTORIES

Veterans and Family Information Act

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to make all of its fact sheets available in English, Spanish, Tagalog and each of the 10 most commonly spoken languages not listed. The act also requires the VA to establish a publicly available website that provides links to all VA fact sheets. Finally, the VA must report to Congress regarding the utilization of such fact sheets as well as the details of the Language Access Plan of the VA.

Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022

The Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide an additional automobile allowance immediately to eligible veterans if 30 years have elapsed since the date they received their first automobile grant. Over time, the period would shorten to 10 years.

The Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022 would also change the definition of “medical services,” to include certain vehicle modifications like van lifts, which are offered through the VA’s Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program. This latter provision would help ensure veterans with non-service-connected illnesses and injuries continue to receive help through the AAE program. A newly added provision would designate non-articulating trailers designed to transport powered wheelchairs, powered scooters, or other similar mobility devices as adaptive equipment.

Veterans Eligible to Transfer School (VETS) Credit Act

This act requires the VA to work with students, explain the school credit transfer process and provide them with a certificate of eligibility from the VA providing proof of their restored benefits.

VA Transparency & Trust Act of 2021

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to submit a plan for obligating and expending covered funds, which are funds made available to the VA in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The act requires the VA to submit biweekly reports regarding obligations, expenditures, and planned uses of the funds until seven days after the VA has expended all covered funds.

The Inspector General of the VA must submit reports examining the obligations and expenditures made using covered funds during the specified reporting period.

Finally, the Government Accountability Office must submit an interim report and final report containing a review of obligations and expenditures made using covered funds.

Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), during FY2022, to establish and maintain three new centers of the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (RANGE) Program in areas with interest from personnel and a need for additional mental health care for rural veterans. The RANGE Program serves veterans in rural areas who are experiencing mental illness.

The act also requires the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study and report on whether the VA has sufficient resources to serve rural veterans who need mental health care that is more intensive than traditional outpatient therapy.

DUMP Opioids Act

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to designate periods during which any individual may dispose of controlled substances medications at VA medical facilities with an on-site pharmacy or a physical location dedicated for law enforcement purposes.

The act also authorizes the VA to carry out public information campaigns regarding the designated disposal periods.

Protecting Moms Who Served Act

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement the maternity care coordination program. The VA must provide community maternity care providers (i.e., non-VA maternity care providers) with training and support with respect to the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum veterans, particularly regarding mental and behavioral health conditions in relation to the service of the veterans in the Armed Forces.

Additionally, the Government Accountability Office must report on maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity among pregnant and postpartum veterans, with a focus on racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health outcomes for veterans.

Veterans Rapid Retraining Assistance Program Restoration and Recovery Act of 2022

This act prohibits the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from charging any entitlement to retraining assistance under the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program in situations where an individual was unable to complete a course or program as a result of the closure of an educational institution or the disapproval of a program by the state approving agency or the VA. The period for which retraining assistance is not charged must be equal to the full amount of retraining assistance provided for enrollment in the program of education.

In the event of a closure or disapproval, the educational institution must not receive any further payments under the program, and any payment already made must be considered an overpayment and constitute a liability of the institution to the United States.

PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act

This act implements a program and a policy related to service dog therapy for veterans. Specifically, the bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement a five-year pilot program to provide canine training to eligible veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder as an element of a complementary and integrative health program. Eligible veterans are those who are enrolled in the VA health care system and have been recommended for participation by a qualified mental health care provider or clinical team.

Responsible Education Mitigating Options and Technical Extensions (REMOTE) Act

This act focused on making sure our veterans get the support they need with their educational benefits, including extending some of the adjustments made due to COVID-19 through June 1, 2022. It allows the VA to waive certain requirements for schools using flat rate tuition structures, simplifying the process for both the schools and the veterans.

Congress also ensured that schools recruiting foreign students who aren't eligible for federal aid won't face unnecessary penalties, especially those located outside the U.S. that meet specific Department of Education guidelines.

For veterans in their final academic term, this law makes sure they can get the financial support they need to finish their program, even if they're taking less than a full course load.

Lastly, the law extends certain VA home loan fees through January 14, 2031, and removes restrictions on hiring VA employees to improve equal employment opportunity counseling services.

Wounded Warrior Access Act

This act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish and maintain a secure online tool or website to enable a claimant or their representative to make records requests related to VA claims and benefits. Requests for records must specify in which format the copy is desired. The VA must notify a requester within 10 days that their request has been received and must fulfill the request within 120 days.

The act also requires the VA to ensure that each time a claimant logs in to a website or online tool of the VA, the website or online tool displays in plain language (1) a warning regarding violations of laws related to agents and attorneys, (2) a link to an online tool to report violations, (3) a link to an online tool to search for a VA-recognized agent or attorney, and (4) a link to a website or online tool providing final decisions on discipline of agents and attorneys for violations.

Solid Start Act of 2022

This act permanently authorizes and expands the Solid Start program, which is an outreach program for veterans in their first year of separation from the military.

Specifically, the act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to coordinate with the Department of Defense to:

- collect updated contact information during transition classes or separation counseling for members of the Armed Forces who are separating from service;
- explain the existence and purpose of the program;
- call veterans three times within the first year of separation;
- publish information about the program in booklets and on the VA website;
- provide women veterans with information tailored to their health care and benefit needs;
- provide information on access to state and local resources, such as Vet Centers;
- gather and analyze data that assesses the effectiveness of the program;
- ensure calls are tailored to each veteran's needs by conducting quality assurance tests; and
- prioritize outreach to veterans who have accessed mental health resources prior to separation from the Armed Forces.

Under the act, the VA is authorized to (1) encourage members of the Armed Forces to provide additional contact information if they are unreachable following their separation, and (2) follow up on missed phone calls.

Wounded Veterans Recreation Act

This act instructs the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to make the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass available, without charge and for the lifetime of the passholder to (1) any U.S. citizen or person domiciled in the United States who has been medically determined to be permanently disabled if the citizen or person furnishes adequate proof of the disability and such citizenship or residency; and (2) any veteran who has been found to have a service-connected disability.

Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative Act of 2020

This act established the Servicemembers and Veterans Initiative within the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The initiative shall:

- serve as legal and policy advisor on DOJ's efforts to enforce criminal and civil laws that impact service members, veterans, and their families;
- develop policy recommendations for improved enforcement of federal law to support service members, veterans, and their families;
- serve as the liaison and point of contact between DOJ and the military departments;
- provide counsel for the Office of Justice Programs to ensure that funding decisions take into account service members, veterans, and their families;
- serve as a liaison and point of contact with the Consumer Protection Branch of DOJ's Civil Division with respect to the prosecution of federal crimes involving fraud that target service members; and
- serve as a liaison and point of contact with other DOJ components as needed to support the enforcement of other federal laws that protect service members and veterans.

Supporting Veterans in STEM Careers Act

This act aims to increase veteran participation in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields by making veterans eligible for certain National Science Foundation (NSF) programs. The NSF is directed to promote veterans' pursuit of STEM and computer science careers, coordinating with other federal agencies, and must submit a plan to Congress for improving outreach. Additionally, the National Science Board will include data on veterans in STEM careers or education in its annual report.

Veterans are made eligible for several NSF programs, including the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship for math and science teachers, NSF fellowships, and computer and network security grants. The bill also requires the Office of Science and Technology Policy to form an interagency group to enhance veteran and military spouse equity in STEM. Finally, the Government Accountability Office will study veterans' success rates and barriers in pursuing STEM, computer science, and other critical fields.

Korean American VALOR Act

This act makes sure that the U.S. and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have a reciprocal agreement in place to cover the healthcare costs for Vietnam Veterans from both nations. There are about 2,800 ROK Vietnam Veterans living in the U.S. today who, just like their American counterparts, were exposed to toxic chemicals during their service. It's only right that they receive the same level of care at the VA. Under this law, Korea will reimburse the U.S. for any healthcare services the VA provides to these Korean Veterans, and in return, we'll reimburse Korea for healthcare they provide to U.S. Veterans living there. This is about fairness and honoring the sacrifices of all Veterans. The U.S. already has similar agreements with allies like the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa, ensuring these nations' Veterans can access care without needing U.S. citizenship.

Specifically, this law:

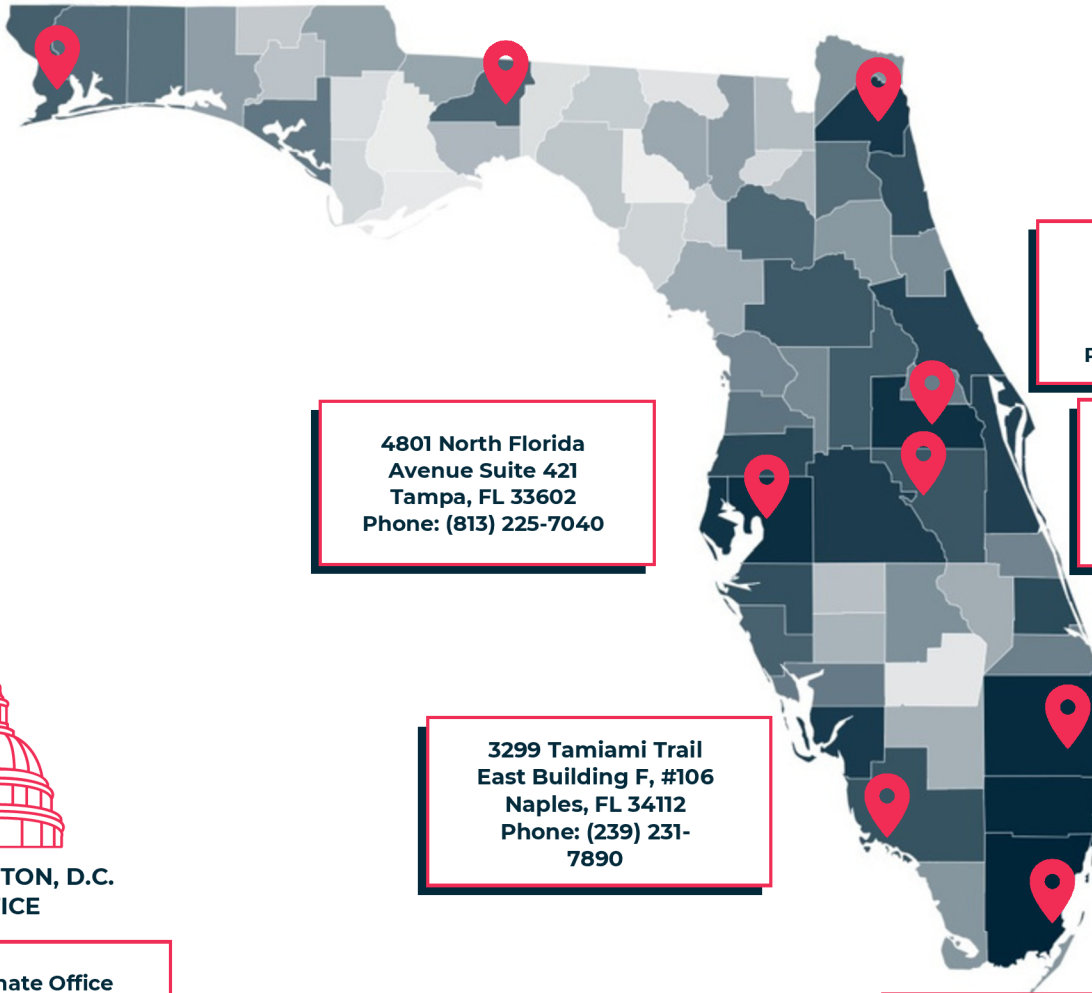
- Expands eligibility for specified Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits (e.g., medical and dental care) to certain veterans of the armed forces of South Korea who served in Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, or during a time period determined by the VA; and
- Authorizes the VA to furnish such benefits under an existing law, which requires (1) a request by South Korea, and (2) a reciprocity agreement that provides for reimbursement of expenses incurred by the VA for the provision of care.

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