



Aloha,

Each Memorial Day, our nation pays tribute to the men and women who sacrificed their lives to protect our country. Hawaii is the home to generations of heroes—from the Civil War to Iraq—and honoring those who made the ultimate sacrifice and their families should be something we do each day.

It's important that these individuals are not forgotten—men and women who have answered the call to serve and are on the front lines, the Hawaii residents who stepped into action on December 7, 1941, the over three hundred lives that Hawaii has lost to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and countless others.

When we look around in Hawaii, we are constantly reminded of how interconnected the military is with our communities. Military families are in our schools, in our churches, and running our small businesses. While some of our servicemen and women have paid the ultimate price, we honor them by keeping our promise to those who are returning home.

As a member of both the Senate Armed Services and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, I am committed to ensuring that current and former service members receive the support and benefits they need and have earned, including those transitioning back to civilian life.

The best way I can help Hawaii's veterans is by listening to you and continuing to highlight your day-to-day concerns and priorities. Please contact my Hawaii office at 808-522-8970, or leave a comment on my website with any concerns or ideas you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mazie K. Hirono". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Senator Hirono attends the Memorial Day ceremony in Hilo presented by VFW Post 3830 and its Ladies Auxiliary

(L to R) State Representative Richard Onishi, Senator Hirono, Mrs. Shelley Peterson and Lt. Col. Jacob Peterson reflect on the sacrifices of America's veterans at Hilo Veterans Cemetery

Washington, D.C. Legislative Update

Senator Hirono continues to fight to improve veterans' access to health care and benefits services. Her [new legislation](#) would improve access to emergency care, simplify the process to receive veteran survivors' benefits, and change Veterans Health Administration practices to increase the hiring of emergency physicians.

National veterans and medical groups praised Senator Hirono's new legislation, which you can read more about [here](#).

"The VFW supports all three of these important measures which we believe will improve access

to care for veterans and timeliness of claim decisions for their survivors, and we thank Senator Hirono for her leadership in bringing them forward,” **said Raymond Kelley, VFW National Legislative Director.**

“Senator Hirono’s legislation will improve access to emergency care for our nation’s veteran’s by making the Veterans Health Administration more competitive with the private sector,” **said Dr. Michael Gerardi, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians.** “Current VHA rules do not provide enough flexibility to recruit and retain the most qualified emergency physicians. My colleagues and I are honored about this potential opportunity to serve veterans.”

Upcoming Local Veteran Events

- Oahu Veteran Benefits Workshop hosted by the VA, June 6th at the Oahu Veterans Center in Foster Village (Salt Lake)
 - VA Benefits Counseling Outreach, June 9th at the VA Kauai Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Lihue
 - Molokai Veteran Benefits Workshop hosted by the VA, June 20th at the Molokai Veterans Center
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Updates from VA

People wishing to receive e-mail from VA with the latest news releases and updated fact sheets can subscribe to the VA Office of Public Affairs Distribution list by [clicking here](#).

[VA Choice Card Customer Contact Center Opening Coming to Hawaii](#) – TriWest Health Care Alliance, the VA’s contractor for the VA Choice Card Program is in the process of opening a Hawaii Office that will include a customer contact center with more than 50 full time staff. TriWest has also established a team to work directly and collaboratively with the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System and our civilian network health care providers to help ensure timely access to quality care for Veterans. Please also let our office know if your organization would like to receive a Choice Card Program briefing from TriWest.

[May is Mental Health Awareness Month](#) - May is Mental Health Awareness Month. To commemorate the month, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is encouraging Veterans, along with their families and friends, to visit and view recovery journey stories on the website, [MakeTheConnection.net](#).

[Vaccinations and Medications during Service](#) - If you are concerned about long-term side effects

from vaccinations or medications during your military service, talk to your health care provider or local VA Environmental Health Coordinator.

[When the Welcome Home Fades](#) - The challenge of readjusting to civilian life affects both Veterans and their families and can last long after the homecoming ends. See how www.MakeTheConnection.net helps Veteran families realize they are not alone and connects them to the support and resources they need to get back on track.

Program Highlight of the Month

Each month, our team highlights a VA benefit and shares local contacts that can provide you with more information about eligibility and enrollment. This month's program highlight is:

Caregiver Services

You may know that VA provides benefits and services for Veterans, but did you know that VA also has a number of services designed specifically to those who serve as a Family Caregiver? Family Caregivers provide crucial support in caring for Veterans. VA recognizes that Family Caregivers in a home environment can enhance the health and well-being of Veterans under VA care.

Services for Family Caregivers of Post-9/11 Veterans

Under the "Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010," additional VA services are now available to seriously injured post-9/11 Veterans and their Family Caregivers through a new program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. VA is now accepting applications for these services.

The application enables Veterans to designate one primary Family Caregiver and up to two secondary Family Caregivers, if desired. Caregiver Support Coordinators are available at every VA Medical Center to assist Veterans and their Family Caregivers with the application process.

Who Is Eligible?

- Veterans eligible for this program are those who sustained a serious injury – including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma or other mental disorder – incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, on or after September 11, 2001.
- Veterans eligible for this program must also be in need of personal care services because of an inability to perform one or more activities of daily living and/or need supervision or protection based on symptoms or residuals of neurological impairment or injury.
- To be eligible for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, Veterans must first be enrolled for VA health services, if not enrolled previously.

Services Available to Family Caregivers through this Program

The law will provide additional assistance to primary Family Caregivers of eligible post-9/11 Veterans and Servicemembers. Services for this group include:

- Monthly stipend
- Travel expenses (including lodging and per diem while accompanying Veterans undergoing care)
- Access to health care insurance (if the Caregiver is not already entitled to care or services under a health care plan)
- Mental health services and counseling
- Comprehensive VA Caregiver training provided by Easter Seals
- Respite care (not less than 30 days per year)

You can contact Hawaii's Caregiver Support Team at:

[VA Pacific Islands Health Care System](#)

459 Patterson Road, Honolulu, HI 96819-1522

Phone: 808-433-0600

Heidimarie Chung, RN, BSN: 808-433-0371

Julie Patry, LCSW: 808-873-3681

Keri Ann Asakura, LCSW: 808-433-4622

Sara Tompkison, LCSW: 808-433-0310

Charlene Burgess, MSW: 808-246-2621

For more information and additional resources for veterans and family members of all service eras visit: http://www.caregiver.va.gov/resources_landing.asp

Casework Assistance and Benefits Quick Info

VA Crisis Hotline- 1-800-273-8255, press 1

Senator Hirono's Hawaii Office- 808-522-8970

Honolulu Regional Benefits Office- 800-827-1000

Maui VR&E Benefits Office- 808-873-9426

Hilo VR&E Benefits Office- 808-935-6691

If you need assistance with a federal agency, my staff will make every effort to help you in obtaining timely and accurate information on the status of your claim. Some of the most common inquiries in addition to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims and services include Social Security claims, immigration petitions, and foreclosure cases. Please note that Members of Congress cannot request that the agency provide you with anything that is not authorized by federal law or regulation, or pressure the agency for particular outcomes. My office can request, for example, that you are afforded due process, that you receive timely responses, and that errors that may exist in the handling of your request are corrected.

If you or someone you know could benefit from assistance from my office, please visit my Federal Agency Assistance page by [clicking here](#), call my Hawaii Office at 808-522-8970, or email Hawaiioffice@hirono.senate.gov.

In addition, to apply for Veterans' Benefits Online (VONAPP), access VA Payment History, apply for VA Home Loan Certificate of Eligibility, check on Compensation & Pension status and more – Create an eBenefits account online at www.ebenefits.va.gov

For local and national contacts, please visit my veteran resource page by [clicking here](#).

You can follow my work in the U.S. Senate on [Twitter](#). As this mailbox is for outgoing messages only, if you would like to contact me, please visit my [website](#).