
P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Largest Veterans Affairs Union Praises Introduction of VA Employee Fairness Act in House and Senate

Washington, D.C. – Today, the American Federation of Government Employees' National VA Council (AFGE NVAC), the union representing over 265,000 Veterans Affairs (VA) workers, praised the introduction of the VA Employee Fairness Act of 2021, which was created to support the goal of building a talented workforce to care for America's veterans. The bill was introduced by Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio).

If enacted, the legislation would create a better environment for attracting and retaining physicians, nurses, and other healthcare workers by restoring collective bargaining rights to medical professionals at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

While VA employees have had collective bargain rights since 1991, health care providers are exempted from collective bargaining on matters of professional conduct or competence, peer-review, or changes to employee compensation. As a result, they are prevented from raising grievances about staffing shortages that undermine patient care or negotiating for competitive pay that will attract health care workers to the VA. The VA Employee Fairness Act removes this exemption, and grants front line health care providers their full collective bargaining rights.

"Thank you Chairman Takano and Senator Brown for standing with the front-line heroes who have risked their lives to care for our nation's veterans throughout the pandemic," said AFGE President Everett Kelley. "The restrictions placed upon doctors' and nurses' union rights have always been unwarranted. Two years ago, the previous administration went further and stripped medical professionals of almost all of their union rights as part of its larger union-busting agenda. It is critical that Congress pass the VA Employee Fairness Act to ensure that all VA workers who have elected union representation have a voice in the workplace, regardless of their job title."

"On behalf of over 265,000 employees we represent at the Department of Veterans Affairs, I applaud Chairman Takano and Senator Brown's decisions to re-introduce the VA Employee Fairness Act in the House and Senate. If leaders in Congress truly want to protect front-line healthcare workers and our nation's Veterans as they say they do, then they will vote to pass this bill," said AFGE NVAC President Alma Lee. "This pandemic has shed a light on the importance of workers having a voice on the job. Politicians across the aisle have a duty to protect our federal workforce, strengthen their collective bargaining rights, and partner with federal sector unions. I look forward to working with members of the House and Senate to get this done."

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The introduction of the VA Employees Fairness Act in the House comes at a time when VA employees and facilities across the country have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, just as they continue their decades-long fight for fair collective bargaining agreement. Under the Trump administration, the VA developed a [track record](#) of ignoring worker concerns and putting veterans' lives at risk.

The importance of a fair contract is a matter of life and death during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed the lives of [135 VA employees](#) and over [10,500 veterans](#). Currently, the VA has recorded more than [228,000 COVID-19 cases](#) in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and nearly [18,000](#) VA employees have contracted the virus.

AFGE NVAC's legal team, leadership and members are available for media interviews to discuss the dire need for workplace protections, and how the absence of a fair contract has impacted employees' health and ability to care for our nation's veterans.

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