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Largest Federal Employee Union Celebrates House Passage of Legislation Expanding Collective Bargaining Rights for Healthcare Workers

AFGE NVAC leaders call on the Senate to pass the critical legislation

Nationwide - The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest union representing 700,000 federal and D.C. government employees, is celebrating the House of Representatives passage of the [VA Employee Fairness Act of 2021](#) (H.R. 1948). Having advocated for decades for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care providers who have been wrongfully excluded from certain collective bargaining benefits, the union applauds this victory as it reaffirms its commitment to fighting for all VA employees.

"On behalf of the 291,000 VA employees our union represents, we thank the House members and the Biden-Harris Administration for continuing to stand with the dedicated, hardworking employees at the VA and the veterans they serve," said AFGE National VA Council President Alma Lee. "For decades, the VA has been losing staff to the private sector due to better bargaining rights, working conditions, salaries and benefits, and the pandemic exacerbated the issue. If enacted, this legislation will significantly improve the VA's ability to recruit and retain top talent because VA healthcare workers will have more of a voice on the job."

The bill, sponsored by Chairman Mark Takano (D-Calif.), expands collective bargaining rights for all employees appointed under 38 USC 7401(1), allowing them to improve the VA's ability to provide the highest standards of care for veterans by giving these workers a voice on the job. For years, the VA has used its power under 38 USC 7422 to deny certain rights to Title 38 employees, including physicians, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, chiropractors, nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants, and expanded-function dental auxiliaries, that are available to VA employees.

"We celebrate the House passage of the "VA Employee Fairness Act" as for decades thousands of Title 38 VA employees have been unfairly deprived of the same collective bargaining rights of their colleagues simply because of their job title," said AFGE National President Everett Kelley. "Our union thanks House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Takano for his leadership on this bill and the House members who voted to provide a voice to these essential workers who work around the clock providing healthcare to our nation's heroes. We call on the Senate to pass this critical legislation, and if not, President Biden and VA Secretary Denis McDonough must use their authority to provide expanded collective bargaining rights through executive action, consistent with their statement of support for the bill."

The VA Employee Fairness Act aims to reduce turnover, increase staff levels, and improve the care that veterans receive by repealing the provisions from Section 7422 that limit collective bargaining rights for VA workers appointed under 38 USC (7401(1)). Without the ability to grieve issues on matters of peer review, compensation, and patient care issues, clinicians cannot speak up on issues related to patient safety, and more significant matters in VA facilities often go unaddressed. Full collective bargaining rights for all VA employees would improve the recruitment and retention of qualified clinical professionals working and seeking work at the VA.

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The National VA Council (NVAC) is the largest federal employee council, representing over 290,000 workers in VA health care system.