

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CHAIRMAN MIKE BOST

H.R. 3581, as amended: The COPE Act (Caregiver Outreach and Program Enhancement Act)

Background:

The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) plays a vital role in certifying and providing resources for caregivers. The stress of providing care often leaves caregivers wrestling with their own mental and physical hardships while they struggle to maintain a strong front for the veterans dependent on their care. In the current program, while caregivers are eligible for mental health support from VA, that aid has been constrained due to limited access and resources, as well as for intangible reasons such as stigma or fear of being disenrolled from the caregiver program. These circumstances leave veteran caregivers with partially fulfilled mental health needs. *The COPE Act* would help address this issue by setting up a grant program that would help caregivers seek the mental health care they need without fear of reducing access for veterans or concerns about stigma.

Many VA medical facilities are at least 60 years old. Some of these facilities have been subject to flooding that impacts ingress or egress, or even threatens building functions. Recognizing the need for collaboration with local authorities in flood preparedness, *the COPE Act* also proposes an expansion of the current statute to allow the VA to contribute to flood mitigation investments on non-VA property adjacent to facilities.

And finally, *the COPE Act* responds to the alarming increase in violent crimes within VA's facilities. Despite efforts to rework policing structures and increase officer numbers, the recent surge in incidents demands a closer examination through additional data. The legislation underscores the necessity of transparency and data collection, ensuring that VA facilities are safe, secure environments for those seeking essential care and services.

The Message:

- Caregivers of veterans would benefit from an alternative resource, via grants, when seeking the mental health care that is critical to maintaining the quality of the care they are able to provide.
- Supporting state and local efforts to protect VA infrastructure from flooding mitigates risk and ensures resilience of critical healthcare infrastructure for our veterans.
- *The COPE Act* reaffirms House Republicans' commitment to improve safety and security at VA facilities. It addresses challenges in policing effectiveness, demonstrating the party's dedication to safeguarding veterans seeking essential services.