

JOE COURTNEY
U.S. Congressman CT Second Congressional District

THE VETERANS UPDATE



Are you a veteran seeking assistance with the VA or other federal agency?

Congressman Courtney's office can help provide a wide range of assistance and support to veterans who are having difficulty with their benefits, care, or other matters.

If you or someone you know needs assistance, you can contact Congressman Courtney veterans liaison:

Ryan McKenna
(860) 886-0139

Ryan.McKenna@mail.house.gov

Are you a veteran in Crisis needing Immediate assistance?

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text.

*Veterans and their loved ones can call **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**, or send a text message to 838255 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year*

<http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>



JOE COURTNEY
U.S. Congressman CT Second Congressional District

THE VETERANS UPDATE



Update on Connecticut VA Audit Results

Prepared by the Office of Congressman Joe Courtney

In response to widespread criticism that it was covering up long wait time for access to care, on May 21, 2014 the Veterans Administration (VA) launched a national audit to determine the actual wait times for all VA facilities. This audit found systemic reporting problems in multiple VA facilities. The results of the audits are posted every two weeks at <http://va.gov/health/access-audit.asp>.

Recent Reports of “Tripling” of Wait Times in Connecticut

Connecticut-specific wait times have been consistently below national and regional averages and a vast majority of appointments are scheduled 30 days of the date requested. However, there has been some commentary in the media about the perceived “tripling” of the number of vets having to wait more than 30 days for an appointment.

After contacting officials at West Haven and at national VA headquarters, Congressman Courtney’s office determined that the conclusions about the so-called “tripling” were likely due to differences in the measurement of wait times from the first audit to subsequent audits. For example, the original June 9 audit notes that “wait times Computed using Desired Date” while the subsequent audits note that “Wait Times Computed using Desired Date and Create Date.”

On July 17, the VA released both the **updated bimonthly audit** and a **correction of the June 9 audit** to show wait times computed consistently using ‘desired date’ (the date on which existing patents seek their medical appointments) *and* ‘create date’ (which refers to appointments for new patients). In the release of the corrected June 9 audit, the VA noted that:

Initial data published for [the June 9 audit] contained accurate data except for the count and percent of appointments less than 30 days. The timeliness for new patients were erroneously computed using the "desired data" for the Veterans' appointment versus the date the appointment was initially created. The net effect of this error is that, as published, the 6/9/14 report represents 6.7% more appointments occurring within 30 days. This current posting of data corrects this error.

According to the updated VA data, the number of Connecticut veterans with an appointment scheduled over 30 days has increased slightly from 5.1% of all scheduled appointments to 6% between June 9 and July 17. While still showing an increase, the updated data corrects the perception that wait times have “tripled” for Connecticut’s veterans.

Audit Release Date	Total Appts Scheduled	Appts scheduled 30 Days or under	Percent Appts scheduled 30 Days or under	Appts scheduled over 30 Days	CT: Percent Appts scheduled over 30 Days	US: Percent Appts scheduled over 30 Days
6/9/2014 (Original)	49,129	48,131	98.0%	998	2.0 %	
6/9/2014 (corrected)	49,127	46,604	94.9%	2,523	5.1%	9.9%
6/19/2014	51,815	49,162	94.9%	2,653	5.1%	10.0%
7/3/2014	51,890	49,163	94.8%	2,727	5.3%	10.3%
7/17/2014	49,619	46,603	93.9%	3,016	6.0%	10.7%

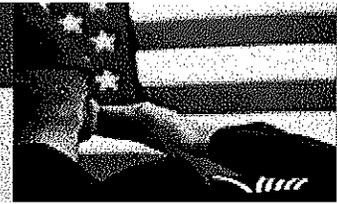
Connecticut’s Most Recent Audit

According to the most recent audit released by the VA on July 17, 94% of the over 49,600 appointments currently scheduled within 30 days – with 86.6% of all appointments scheduled within 14 days, 7.4% scheduled between 15-30 days, 3.8% between 31-60 days, and 2.3% after 60 days. Of the 6% of appointments currently scheduled after 30 days, 62% are scheduled for between 31-60 days.

Total Appointments	Appts Between 0 - 14 Days	Appts Between 15 - 30 Days	Appts Between 31 - 60 days	Appts Between 61 - 90 Days	Appts Between 91 - 120 Days	Appts Beyond 120 Days
49,619	42,955	3,648	1,862	545	261	348
	86.6%	7.4%	3.8%	1.1%	0.5%	0.7%

Data based on July 17 audit results

Also, the audit shows that the number of new enrollee appointment requests – anyone who enrolled in VA over the last 10 years and did not have an appointment scheduled – has declined from 374 to 3, or 99%. Additionally, the number of people on the electronic wait list – the number of new people who couldn’t get an appointment scheduled within 90 days – declined from 59 to 2, or 97%.



The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 *Prepared by the Office of Congressman Joe Courtney*

On July 30, Congressman Courtney joined a bipartisan majority in the House to pass the final Conference Report on H.R. 3230, The Veterans Access, Choice & Accountability Act of 2014. This measure is an important first step in addressing the nation-wide challenges with access to VA medical care that have come to light in recent months.

Expanding Access to Health Care for Veterans: The bulk of the funding in this agreement – \$10 billion in emergency funding – is dedicated to expanding access to non-VA health care options for veterans who have been left waiting for more than 30 days for an appointment or live more than 40 miles from the nearest VA facility. Eligible veterans must be enrolled in the VA health care system by August 1, 2014 or have served in active-duty within the last five years.

Addressing the Shortage of Health Professionals in the VA: The bill provides \$5 billion to VA to hire more primary and specialty care physicians and other medical staff. The agreement also includes incentives to attract more doctors, nurses and other medical personnel to the VA, and to increase medical education opportunities to attract doctors in the future.

VA Facilities: The conference report includes \$1.5 billion for leases for 27 new VA clinics in 18 states and Puerto Rico bringing care closer to where veterans live and increasing access to specialty care services. This includes \$4.9 million for the Errera Community Care Center in West Haven.

Accountability: The conference agreement gives the VA Secretary the authority to immediately fire or demote senior executives based on poor job performance or misconduct. The bill also includes an expedited appeals process for terminated employees to prevent political firings, protects whistleblowers from retaliation, caps the amount of bonuses the VA may pay each year and requires the VA to establish penalties for employees who knowingly submit false appointment wait-time data.

Sexual Assault: The bill expands VA authority to provide counseling, care and other services to veterans and certain other non-veteran servicemembers who have experienced military sexual trauma during active or inactive duty training (including members of the National Guard and Reserves). The conference agreement also requires the VA and DOD to conduct an annual assessment focused on the transition and continuum of care from DOD to VA for those who have experienced military sexual trauma.

Expanding Access to Education for Veterans & Their Families: Lets veterans who are eligible for education benefits under the Post 9-11 New GI Bill qualify for in-state tuition. The bill also expands the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship to include spouses of members of the Air Force who die in the line duty while serving in active duty.

Community-Based Housing for Veterans with TBI: Extends a VA program that was about to expire that allows veterans struggling with TBI to live in community-based, rehabilitative housing.

Strong Support From national Veterans Organizations. A number of Veterans' Service Organizations (VSOs) have voiced support this conference agreement including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Paralyzed Veterans of America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), and Disabled American Veterans (DAV).