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INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES

July 9, 2020

Aloha!

I am writing to provide you and our veterans community with a further update on Congress' and my efforts to assist our veterans and your 'ohana during this Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. I want to assure you first that my staff and I remain fully on the job and fully committed to addressing any and all of your questions and concerns. Whether or not related to COVID-19, we are fully available to assist with your needs throughout this crisis.

**Automatic Cash Payments to Veterans with Pensions.** The U.S. Department of the Treasury and Internal Revenue Service (IRS) have announced that veterans and beneficiaries who receive compensation and benefit payments should automatically receive their Recovery Rebates (cash payments) without needing to file additional paperwork. This was in response to concerns many veterans raised with me and that my colleagues and I addressed with the Administration in a joint letter that can be viewed at <https://case.house.gov/resources>. For the full announcement, please visit <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm984>.

If you are unsure if you are entitled to these payments or have not yet received your payments, here is information online: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/economic-impact-payments-what-you-need-to-know>. The IRS has also developed this online tool that will allow veterans and your 'ohana to check the status of your payments: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payments>.

Please note that according to the IRS, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) beneficiaries with child dependents must still provide additional information in order to collect the \$500 payment per eligible child. This information can be provided to the IRS online here: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/non-filers-enter-payment-info-here>.

If you have any questions on the Recovery Rebate cash payments and would like assistance, please contact my Honolulu Office by telephone at (808) 650-6688 or by email at [Ed.Case@mail.house.gov](mailto:Ed.Case@mail.house.gov) and we will try our best to assist you.

**Emotional and Mental Health.** The public health, economic and social effects of the COVID-19 crisis are difficult for all of us, and it is important than ever that we care for the emotional and mental health of ourselves and those around us. For our veterans and your families, the VA has put together resources especially for you here: <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus>. You can also visit <https://maketheconnection.net/mhm> to connect and share with fellow veterans to help each other.

When Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) to provide trillions of dollars of COVID-19 emergency assistance, my colleagues and I were also focused on the second-order impacts of COVID-19 from the required separation and isolation, including mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence. That's why we included \$425 million for the Substance Abuse and Mental Services





Administration to increase access to mental health services like suicide prevention programs in our communities. We also provided \$45 million for Family Violence Prevention Services to address domestic violence and \$50 million for the Legal Services Corporation to help low-income Americans with legal issues including those involving domestic violence. Please contact my office if you or yours need help and we will try our best to connect you with the right resources.

**TRICARE Copay Relief for Mail Order Prescriptions.** COVID-19 has brought its own challenges to TRICARE, which is taking steps to help veterans with these issues. You can also get the latest TRICARE-related COVID-19 information online at <https://www.tricare.mil/HealthWellness/HealthyLiving/Coronavirus>.

I also recently signed a joint letter to U. S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy urging them to support legislation to temporarily waive mail order copays to help TRICARE beneficiaries access their medications without incurring extra cost or endangering their health. Our letter can be viewed at <https://case.house.gov/resources>. I further became an original cosponsor of H.R. 6573, the Help Our Heroes Access Medicine Act, which would temporarily waive TRICARE copayments for mail order prescriptions during a national or public health emergency.



**Protections for Student Veterans.** H.R. 6322, the Student Veterans Coronavirus Response Act which I cosponsored, was recently signed into law by President Trump. This measure will ensure that student veterans benefits are not negatively impacted by a disaster or national health emergency like the current COVID-19 pandemic. Among other provisions, H.R. 6322 extends the time limit of GI Bill benefits for student veterans impacted by the temporary closure of their educational institution or termination of their program due to an emergency such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, extends the time limit for participation in vocational rehabilitation when participation is prevented due to national emergency and authorizes the VA to continue to pay work-study and subsistence allowances for veterans in work programs.

I also signed a letter to congressional leadership supporting further GI Bill protections for non-traditional student veterans, funding for the Department of Labor's Registration Apprenticeship Program and increased access for transitioning servicemember to training programs and support services.

**Presumptive Service Connection Claims During COVID-19.** Veterans have contacted me with concerns that individuals recently separated from the armed forces may not be able to get appointments to diagnose and treat certain chronic conditions, which must be diagnosed within one year to be considered for presumptive service connection by the VA. The VA has been a productive partner during this crisis and provided guidance in response to these concerns.

Specifically, according to the VA Pacific Islands Health Care System (VAPIHCS), while it cannot currently provide a timeline for when appointments will return to normal, the limited face-to-face appointments due to social distancing efforts is only a temporary measure. The VAPIHCS will return to normal once it is determined that limiting these appointments is no longer necessary.

The Honolulu Regional Benefits Office advised that veterans seeking treatment outside the VA for a service-related illness or disease may use these diagnoses and treatment records for their claim. If veterans are unable to receive any diagnosis or treatment for a service-related illness or disease due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they are encouraged to submit claims for the conditions they believe are service-related and state they are unable to provide treatment documentation due to the COVID-19 pandemic but are in the process of obtaining evidence from their physician.

If you or a veteran you know needs assistance with an appointment with the VA or on a benefits claim, please visit my website at <https://case.house.gov/forms/casework> or contact Chad Wolke from my Honolulu Office at [chad.wolke@mail.house.gov](mailto:chad.wolke@mail.house.gov).

**When The Akimotos Went To War.** Even during this terrible crisis, my office has continued with various other initiatives for our veterans and your 'ohana. As one, we recently helped the Nisei Veterans Legacy gather information compiled by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) about members of the 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team buried at our national cemeteries overseas. The ABMC was very gracious in its response, providing my office and the Nisei Veterans Legacy with biographies of various Nisei soldiers compiled by ABMC staff including copies of *When The Akimotos Went To War*.

Although the ABMC did not provide enough copies to distribute to our various veterans groups in Hawai'i, it did provide an electronic copy to share with you, which can be viewed and downloaded at <https://case.house.gov/resources>. I invite you to share this inspiring story among your community, family and friends.

**VA COVID-19 Testing & ALOHA Project.** Another major initiative I continue to devote myself to is our longstanding goal of commencing and completing the Advanced Leeward Outpatient Healthcare Access (ALOHA) Project, a critical facility for our veterans and for our post-COVID-19 recovery slated for 'Ewa that has faced repeated delays for too long. During a recent hearing in my House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies, I questioned VA Secretary Robert Wilkie on both the availability of COVID-19 test kits for the VA and the status of ALOHA. I invite you to view my questioning on my YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/RepEdCase>. I also signed a letter with my congressional colleagues to Secretary Wilkie asking him to address delays in the VA Major Medical Leasing process to include delays with the ALOHA Project, which can be viewed at <http://case.house.gov/resources>.

As we continue to work through this crisis together, please visit my COVID-19 website at <https://case.house.gov/coronavirus> for the latest updates of my efforts to help our state and to read an automatically updated fact sheet about COVID-19 prepared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This site includes a summary of resources available to those already feeling the economic impact of COVID-19, which you can download directly at [https://case.house.gov/uploadedfiles/coronavirus\\_handout.pdf](https://case.house.gov/uploadedfiles/coronavirus_handout.pdf).

I am humbled at the responsibility of representing Hawai'i's veterans and your families, especially in these very difficult times. Please contact me with your questions or needs anytime, and please continue to let me know of your views. Please also sign up for regular updates from me and my office through my e-newsletter and social media outreach at <https://case.house.gov/contact>. I look forward to seeing you in person soon.

With aloha,

**Ed Case**  
Congressman Ed Case  
Hawai'i-First District