

**NINETY-SIXTH NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
Charlotte, North Carolina
August 26, 27, 28, 2014**

Resolution No. 106: Veterans Transportation System & Benefits Travel

Origin: Delaware

Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

WHEREAS, In the Fall of 2010, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) implemented the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) in order to improve access to VHA health care services; and

WHEREAS, The VTS program provided mobility managers, transportation coordinators, and vehicles to be driven by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) staff and volunteers; and

WHEREAS, On May 7, 2012, the Office of General Counsel released opinion, VAOPGCADV 5-2012, which found that the VA only has the authority to use volunteer drivers to provide veterans transportation to and from VA health care facilities, not paid employees; and

WHEREAS, Some facilities solely rely on the VTS system, because they do not have volunteer drivers; and

WHEREAS, The vans utilized by the VA for must be parked on federal government property; and

WHEREAS, Some drivers in rural locations may drive up to two hours one way to pick up a van, which will total eight hours of driving in one day after conducting one trip; and

WHEREAS, If a Memorandums of Understanding were created for local facilities such as post offices, the trip times could be reduced by up to half; and

WHEREAS, The guidelines set forth by the physical examinations make it hard to recruit and retain volunteer drivers, which can create an inconsistent delivery system; and

WHEREAS, Neither the Volunteer Transportation Network nor VTS really works hand in hand with the Beneficiary Travel Office; and

WHEREAS, This can lead with decreased efficiency in cost and coordination of patient transportation; and

WHEREAS, Service-connected and other veterans authorized beneficiary travel only receive \$0.415 (41.5 cents) per mile, and are subject to \$3.00 per one way trip, \$6.00 for a round trip with a maximum deductible of \$18.00 per calendar month; and

WHEREAS, Eligible veterans are not reimbursed at a reasonable level for costs incurred to visit a VA medical facility for service-connected or other authorized care and treatment; and

WHEREAS, Beneficiary travel pay was never intended to pay actual transportation costs, such as authorized by the government for Federal employees, but instead, provided to help defray costs; and

WHEREAS, There are no provisions in law that VA must increase the per mile travel authorization on a regular basis; and

WHEREAS, The beneficiary travel program is discretionary and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is required to review the program annually to determine the VA's ability to maintain the program and its ability to increase the reimbursement rate for eligible veterans; and

WHEREAS, The Secretary of Veterans Affairs has determined that it is necessary to maintain the current reimbursement rate in order to allow the VA health care system to accommodate the increasing patient workload; and

WHEREAS, Mandatory funding for VA health care would allow the Secretary to increase the rate without negative consequences to funding for direct care; and

WHEREAS, The price of gasoline has steadily increased since the \$0.41 rate was established, creating a financial hardship for veterans who have to travel long distances for care, or for those who have limited financial resources; and

WHEREAS, The lack of a consistent and reliable mechanism to periodically adjust the per mile authorization for beneficiary travel creates an injustice and an unfair economic burden to many veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Charlotte, North Carolina, August 26, 27, 28, 2014, That The American Legion urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to seek adequate funding to accommodate the needs of the increasing demand for care, to include the need for a Veterans Transportation System (VTS), accompanied by an increase in the beneficiary travel rate; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to provided dedicated funds for both benefits travel and VTS; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the VA co-locate VTS and the Beneficiary Travel Office to develop transportation departments at the VA medical centers; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to authorize the VA to establish Memorandums of Understanding with state and local government properties with respect to federal government vehicles used for the purpose of transporting veterans to and from the VA medical facilities; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to periodically adjust the rate to assure that the per mile reimbursement rate is increased at a reasonable and acceptable level.