

Congressman Lee M. Zeldin (NY-01)

Testimony on behalf of H.R. 2460, To Improve Provisions of Adult Day Health Care Services for Veterans

Good Morning Chairman Benishek, and thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of my bill, H.R. 2460, which provides no-cost medical model adult day health care services for our 70% or more service connected disabled veterans.

It must always be a top priority of Congress to ensure that all veterans receive the proper treatment and care they deserve after fighting for our country. While overseas, these brave men and women are exposed to significant hardships and trauma, and when they come home, many return with the physical and mental wounds of war. Despite various care options for veterans, their choices are often limited, and can come at a great expense. Service members who are 70% or more disabled from a service connected injury often require significant assistance from others in order to carry out basic everyday tasks. In many instances, veterans must rely on family members for assistance, creating many financial and emotional hardships for both the veteran and his or her family. Alternatively, some veterans, without the proper support system, may even be forced to rely on the assistance of trained medical professionals and reside in institutionalized facilities for daily assistance. Veterans in these facilities often spend significant sums of money each day just to be enrolled, and these expenses can be expected to span the remainder of the veteran's life in many cases.

While alternative options currently exist, accessing these services, however, can often be very difficult. One such program that is currently available is Medical Model Adult Day Health Care; a daily program for disabled veterans who need extra assistance and special attention in their day to day lives. Adult Day Health Care programs provide disabled veterans and their families with a high quality alternative to nursing home care, providing quality outpatient services for those suffering from debilitating illnesses or disabilities. These programs provide a range of services from daily activities, such as bathing, to full medical services, like physical therapy. Adult Day Health Care, however, is only offered currently at three facilities in the United States. Long Island is fortunate to be one of the three locations, with a facility right in the heart of my district in Stony Brook, New York, the Long Island State Veterans Home. There are however, 152 other State Veterans Homes across the country, and this program could easily be offered at any of the 153 total State Veterans Homes. Unfortunately, however, the Department of Veterans Affairs does not currently cover the cost of participation in this program at state veteran homes and the expense of the program is put directly on the veteran and their family, which significantly limits the number of veterans who can enroll.

In order to address this issue and expand access to care for our heroes, I introduced bipartisan legislation in Congress, H.R. 2460, which would ensure that 70% or more service connected

disabled veterans are able to receive Adult Day Health Care at no cost to the veteran and their family by defining the program as a reimbursable treatment option through the VA. My bill would guarantee that all severely disabled veterans are able to access Adult Day Health Care. By providing disabled veterans with access to Adult Day Health Care programs, we can ensure that all veterans receive the best and most efficient outpatient services to provide them with the assistance and special attention that they need in their day to day lives, while still allowing them to maintain their independence.

Adult Day Health Care also helps keep families together and strong. With the inclusion of Adult Day Health Care services as a covered VA expense, family members and caregivers can rest easier knowing that their loved ones are receiving top notch care during the day, while being treated with the same respect and dignity that they would receive at home. Not only does the Adult day Health Care model care for the medical needs of a veteran, but it also addresses their social and emotional needs as well. Adult Day Health Care allows veterans to interact and socialize with their peers and other individuals enrolled in the program. Rather than sitting home alone all day, participants in the adult day health care program receive one-on-one attention from medical and support staff while also maintaining an active social schedule through planned events and activities. Family members and caregivers can go about their day without the worry that their loved ones are unattended, and the veteran can continue to remain as active members of their community.

It is a top priority of mine to ensure that all veterans on Long Island and across the country receive the proper treatment and care they deserve, which is why I fully support the adult day health care program. I will continue working every day to spread awareness of this bill, so that we pass this bill as soon as possible to expand Adult Day Health Care for our disabled veterans, and I thank you for considering this essential piece of legislation.