**Protect Access to Vital Ground Ambulance Services for Veterans and Communities**

***Cosponsor S. 2757/H.R. 5530***

***VA Final Rule on Special Modes of Transportation***

* In January 2023, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issued a final rule entitled “Change in Rates VA Pays for Special Modes of Transportation.”
* The final rule is currently scheduled to take effect on February 16, 2025.
* Under the final rule, the VA would reimburse for ambulance services provided through its beneficiary travel program at the lesser of the actual charge or Medicare ambulance rates.
* The Medicare program reimburses for ground ambulance services below the cost of providing critical 9-1-1 emergency and urgent interfacility ambulance medical and transportation services.
* Ground ambulance service organizations are already facing extreme financial challenges with a severe workforce shortage and higher operating costs.
* Further reimbursement cuts could result in longer response times to 9-1-1 calls and urgent requests for interfacility transports of critical patients as well as access to medical care for not only veterans but also entire communities especially in rural areas.

***Medicare Reimburses Below-Cost for Ambulance Services***

* In 2007 and 2012, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted reports on the cost of providing ground ambulance services and found that Medicare reimburses ambulance organizations below the costs of providing services when temporary add-on payments are excluded.
* Since the last GAO report, the disparity between Medicare reimbursement and the cost of providing ground ambulance services has only grown with sequestration cuts, reductions to the ambulance inflation factor and policy changes to the Medicare ambulance fee schedule on one side and accelerated growth in the cost of care (especially since 2020) for fuel, medical supplies, maintenance of vehicles, staffing, insurance, regulatory oversight, and other essential elements of safely providing our services on the other side.

***Support the VA Emergency Transportation Access Act***

* The VA Emergency Transportation Access Act (S. 2757, H.R. 5530) by Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, Chairwoman Murray and Senator Boozman as well as Chairman Bost and Zinke respectively, would direct the VA to further analyze the impact of the final rule and create an advisory committee to evaluate future reimbursement rates which could not be below the cost of providing vital ambulance services.
* Please cosponsor the VA Emergency Transportation Access Act by contacting Tess Wrzesinksi with the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee or Olivia Naughton with the House Veterans Affairs Committee.