



Improving VA's Automobile and Adaptive Equipment Grants

BACKGROUND

Currently, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers two types of grants, which are often used together, to help veterans with disabilities buy a specially adapted vehicle or make modifications to an existing vehicle: the **VA Automobile Grant** and the **VA Automobile Adaptive Equipment Grant**.

Unfortunately, the **VA Automobile Grant** has not kept pace with inflation and provides only one-third to one-half of the actual cost of an adapted vehicle, which can be \$40,000 to \$65,000 when a vehicle is new. Since a grant of \$22,355.72 is only available once, many veterans who use this program continue to drive their original modified vehicle beyond its intended lifespan because they are unable to bear the financial burden of purchasing a new adaptive vehicle.

The **Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program** provides funding to make modifications to a vehicle that will assist a veteran with disabilities in entering, exiting, and/or operating a vehicle. This grant, which can be used more than once, provides reimbursement for items designated by VA as necessary vehicle equipment to veterans with service-connected disabilities such as wheelchair lifts and digital driving systems. The grant also provides reimbursement for standard equipment such as power steering that reduces steering effort to operate a vehicle. A veteran may be eligible during a four-year period for adaptive equipment on up to two vehicles. Payments for this equipment can be made directly to the veteran or to the seller, and the maximum amounts are set periodically by the Veterans Health Administration.

Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities for Veterans Act/AUTO for Veterans Act (S. 444/H.R.1361):

- **Allows eligible service-connected veterans to receive an Automobile Allowance Grant every ten years for the purchase of a new or used adapted automobile vehicle.**
- This bill authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide or assist in providing an eligible veteran with a service-connected disability with an additional automobile under the VA automobile allowance program.

Care Access Resources for Veterans Act/CARS for Vets Act (H.R. 3304):

- **The AAE should be expanded to cover additional equipment that allows veterans with disabilities to safely enter, exit, and operate a vehicle.**
- Authorizes the VA to provide an eligible veteran with an additional vehicle if 10 years have elapsed since they received their previously covered vehicle.
- Expands definition of "medical services" to include certain vehicle modifications such as van lifts, raised roofs, air-conditioning and wheelchair tiedowns for passenger use. (Also reimburses for standard equipment such as power steering which reduces steering efforts to operate a vehicle).

VETSFIRST REQUEST TO POLICYMAKERS

- **Please cosponsor and pass S. 444 (Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) and H.R.1361 (Rep. Daniel Meuser (R-PA), the AUTO for Veterans Act.**
- **Please cosponsor and pass H.R. 3304, the CARS for Vets Act, introduced by Rep. Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX).**
- These bills are crucial in maintaining access to adaptive vehicles that are essential for veterans with disabilities to be independent and to be able to participate in their communities.