

# Duckworth Introduces Comprehensive Bill Package To Help Protect Servicemembers And Veterans From Deportation

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today re-introduced several bills to protect and support Veterans and servicemembers who have proven they are willing to lay down their lives defending our nation. Duckworth's proposals—the *Veterans Visa and Protection Act*, *HOPE Act* and *I-VETS*

*Act*—would prohibit the deportation of Veterans who are not violent offenders, give legal permanent residents a path to citizenship through military service and strengthen VA healthcare services for Veterans.

“Far too many men and women willing to wear our uniform have been deported by the same nation they risked their lives to defend due the unnecessary and complex barriers they faced during the naturalization process,” Duckworth said. “These important bills would make it easier for Servicemembers and Veterans to become citizens, enabling them to live here with their families and ensuring they can access the life-saving VA care they earned through their tremendous sacrifices.”

On Tuesday, Duckworth [released a report](#) that details the history of immigrants enlisting in the U.S. military, the complicated path to military naturalization, barriers deported Veterans face in accessing Veterans Affairs’ benefits, recommended policy solutions and much more. Duckworth also [testified](#) at a U.S. Senate Judiciary Immigration Subcommittee Hearing yesterday on deported Veterans.

“Any person brave enough to put their lives on the line for our country should not face deportation upon returning home from war,” said U.S. Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-03), who is leading the House version of the *Veterans Visa and Protection Act*. “This legislation will allow us to honor our commitments to immigrant veterans and bring them home to live freely in the country they enlisted to serve and receive access to the VA benefits they earned through their sacrifice.”

The following bills to remove barriers to citizenship and healthcare for servicemembers and Veterans were re-introduced today by Senator Duckworth:

- The *Veterans Visa and Protection Act of 2021* would prohibit the deportation of Veterans who are not violent offenders, establish a visa program through which deported Veterans may enter the US as legal permanent residents to become naturalized citizens through military service and extend military and Veterans benefits to those who would be eligible for those benefits if they were not deported.
  - This legislation is co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Cory Booker (D-NJ).
- The *Immigrant Veterans Eligibility Tracking System (I-VETS Act) of 2021* would identify non-citizens who are currently serving or who have served in the armed forces when they are applying for immigration benefits or when placed in immigration enforcement proceedings.
  - This legislation is co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), and Mazie Hirono (D-HI).

- The *Healthcare Opportunities for Patriots in Exile (HOPE) Act of 2021* would allow non-violent, deported Veterans the opportunity to temporarily parole back into the United States to seek care from a VA facility.
  - This legislation is co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Mazie Hirono (D-HI).

All three bills are supported by the American Legion.

Duckworth has been active in protecting Veterans from deportation and helping those who have been deported gain citizenship and access to important VA services. In January of this year, Duckworth [asked](#) President Biden to prohibit the deportation of Veterans and strengthen the naturalization process for Servicemembers. Last Congress, she introduced the [Strengthening Citizenship Services for Veterans Act](#), legislation that would ensure deported Veterans who have successfully completed the preliminary naturalization process can attend their citizenship interview at a port of entry, embassy or consulate without navigating the complex process of advance parole.

In 2019, Duckworth [traveled to Tijuana, Mexico](#), on Veterans Day to meet with a group of Veterans who have been deported to hear about their efforts to access the VA healthcare benefits they've earned.

Although the exact number is unknown, hundreds of non-citizen Veterans are estimated to have been deported from the United States in recent years and former President Trump's 2017 executive order expanding the grounds for deportation could have also lead to an increase in the deportation of Veterans. While most deported Veterans were eligible for naturalization when they were in the military, the U.S. government has often failed to prioritize assisting non-citizen servicemembers with completing the naturalization process. Because of this lack of follow-through, some Veterans who thought they had become citizens found out later that they were vulnerable to deportation because their paperwork had never been processed.

Once a Veteran is deported, they are usually unable to access the full VA benefits they have earned and would receive if they were still living in the United States. Many have trouble accessing even basic medical care, even though Veterans struggle with higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and physical health problems like chronic pain than the general population. Many deported Veterans are also separated from their families and their children who live in the U.S., while those deported to Mexico or Central America are especially vulnerable to threats from gangs and drug cartels due to their military experience.