

THE VSRA

The Veteran Service Recognition Act (“VSRA”), H.R. 4569, was introduced by House Democrats and Republicans. The bipartisan legislation would support noncitizen service members and veterans in becoming citizens, ensure that the government considers military service in decisions on the deportations of veterans and immediate family members, and create opportunities for deported veterans to return home.

WHAT IS THE VETERAN SERVICE RECOGNITION ACT, H.R. 4569?

The Veteran Service Recognition Act (“VSRA”) is a bipartisan bill introduced in the House of Representatives on July 12, 2023. The bill would ensure that noncitizens who serve in the U.S. military are provided the benefits of the U.S. citizenship that they earned. Most importantly, it would:

- Eliminate historic barriers that have prevented immigrant servicemembers from being able to complete the citizenship process during their military service;
- Protect against unjust deportations of U.S. veterans; and
- Create a process for deported veterans to apply to come home to the United States and restore their lawful status.

WOULD THE VSRA REQUIRE THE GOVERNMENT TO TRACK AND REPORT ON THE DEPORTATION OF VETERANS?

Yes. The VSRA would require the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to collaborate on a study of noncitizen veterans deported between 1990 to the present, including reporting the number of deported veterans and basic information about their service and immigration history. The VSRA also requires that, going forward, the Department of Homeland Security put in place a system to identify,

maintain, and share across agencies information about veterans it encounters or places in removal proceedings.

WOULD THE VSRA STOP THE DEPORTATIONS OF VETERANS COMPLETELY?

While the VSRA would not stop deportations completely, it would create procedures that require far greater scrutiny of veteran deportation cases to ensure that each case is evaluated closely to determine whether deportation is justified. This evaluation would be done by a committee of 9 appointed individuals, called the Military Family Immigration Advisory Committee. The bill will also ensure that servicemembers have greater access to naturalization services while in the military, so that they become citizens and thus are not vulnerable to deportation.

WHAT WOULD THE MILITARY FAMILY IMMIGRATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE DO?

The Military Family Immigration Advisory Committee, envisioned by the VSRA, would be a body of 9 members appointed by the Secretary of Homeland Security. The Committee would provide recommendations to the Secretary of Homeland Security on the exercise of discretion or whether removal is appropriate in any case involving deportation proceedings for a current servicemember, a veteran, or a covered family member. No person would be permitted to be ordered removed while their case is being reviewed by the Committee.

WOULD ANYONE BE ELIGIBLE TO HAVE THEIR REMOVAL CASE REVIEWED BY THE COMMITTEE?

No. A person convicted of murder, rape, or sexual abuse of a minor would not be eligible to have their case reviewed by the Committee.

HOW WOULD THE VSRA IMPROVE ACCESS TO MILITARY NATURALIZATION DURING WARTIME?

During a time of declared hostilities (as we are in currently), the bill requires the implementation of a program to ensure that noncitizen servicemembers are given the opportunity to apply for naturalization on or after their first day of active-duty service. In addition, the Department of Defense must send noncitizen servicemembers and veterans their certifications of honorable service (a requirement for applying for military naturalization) within 30 days of the noncitizen requesting it. The bill also requires that members of the Judge Advocate General (“JAG”) Corps and military recruiters be trained on military naturalization, so that JAG officers can serve as liaisons to USCIS and ensure that accurate information is provided to recruits and servicemembers.

The bill would ensure that an employee of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”), or, if one is not available, an employee of the Department of Defense who is trained in immigration law, is stationed at every Military Entrance Processing Station (“MEPS”). These individuals must advise every new noncitizen military recruit about their eligibility for military naturalization.

These provisions would address many of the current and historic challenges in ensuring servicemembers are provided accurate information about the naturalization process and ensure they get the assistance they need at basic training to start and finish the naturalization process.

**WOULD THE VSRA ALSO
IMPROVE ACCESS TO MILITARY
NATURALIZATION DURING
PEACETIME?**

Yes. It would expand the period a veteran has after they are honorably discharged from the military to apply for military naturalization from 6 months to one year.

DOES THE VSRA PROVIDE A CHANCE TO COME HOME FOR DEPORTED VETERANS?

Yes. The VSRA would create a permanent pathway for deported veterans to request to come home. It would allow deported veterans to apply directly to the Department of Homeland Security for adjustment of status to lawful permanent resident, even if they have a removal order and are inadmissible.

Not every deported veteran will be eligible to apply to come home. Anyone who is considered to have engaged in serious criminal offenses will be ineligible to apply to return home to the United States. Those crimes include murder, human trafficking, terrorism, espionage, sabotage, certain other security-related offenses, child pornography,

promoting prostitution-related offenses, slavery, involuntary servitude, and peonage. Additionally, any person with 5 or more convictions for driving while intoxicated will be ineligible, unless the convictions are older than 25 years.

WILL THE VSRA PROTECT MILITARY FAMILY MEMBERS FROM DEPORTATION?

Any removal case involving the spouse or the child of a servicemember or veteran will be eligible to be reviewed by the Military Family Immigration Advisory Committee for a recommendation to the Secretary of Homeland Security about whether to seek removal of the individual. They will be subject to the same procedures and exceptions as servicemembers and veterans.

WILL THE VSRA ALSO HELP NONCITIZEN SPOUSES, CHILDREN, AND PARENTS OF U.S. CITIZEN SERVICEMEMBERS, AND VETERANS TO REGULARIZE THEIR IMMIGRATION STATUS?

Yes. The VSRA would eliminate specific legal barriers to adjustment of status to lawful permanent residence for the spouses, children, and parents of U.S. citizen servicemembers and veterans who serve a minimum of 2 years on active duty or in a reserve component and, if discharged, are discharged under honorable conditions.

WHAT VETERAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS (“VSOS”) SUPPORT THE VSRA?

The bill is endorsed by the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vote Vets, among others.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT THE VSRA?

Voice your support by sending a message to your member of Congress asking them to support the VSRA. [Click here to send your message today.](#)

Reach out to your member of Congress and ask for a meeting to discuss your support for the bill.

If you are a veteran, ask your local American Legion or Veteran of Foreign Wars chapter to get involved in advocating for the passage of the bill.