

SHERYL ZIMMERMAN, PHD, UNIVERSITY DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR  
SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK AND PUBLIC HEALTH  
CO-DIRECTOR, PROGRAM ON AGING, CHRONIC ILLNESS, AND LONG-TERM CARE  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

July 28, 2023

The Honorable Elissa Slotkin, U.S. House of Representatives  
2245 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bryan Steil, U.S. House of Representatives  
1526 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Trone, U.S. House of Representatives  
2404 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ann Kuster, U.S. House of Representatives  
2201 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Slotkin, Steil, Trone and Kuster:

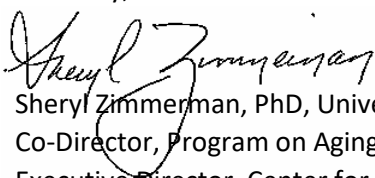
On behalf of the Center for Excellence in Assisted Living at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (CEAL@UNC), thank you for your continued leadership on issues and legislation important to the accessibility of assisted living (AL) and other forms of long-term care. We write to express our support for the bipartisan Expanding Veterans' Options for Long Term Care Act (H.R. 1815), which would allow our nation's veterans to remain independent longer and receive better access to long-term care in AL.

CEAL was launched in 2003 as the first recommendation in the landmark Assisted Living Workgroup report delivered to the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging. For 20 years, CEAL thrived as a unique collaborative of diverse national organizations that work closely together to promote excellence in AL; now based at UNC as CEAL@UNC, it maintains its diversity and national focus and has expanded capacity to develop evidence, bolster the workforce, and promote the adoption of evidence-based practices and policies to advance the well-being of the people who live and work in AL. Today, AL is the largest provider of residential long-term care in the nation, providing care for almost one million older adults; notably, it is the largest residential provider of dementia care.

As of 2020, there were almost 9 million U.S. veterans over the age of 65, and almost 3 million over the age of 85. As the population continues to age, veterans -- including those with chronic conditions including dementia -- will place a heavy burden on the VA health care system, particularly the demand for long-term care; AL can help fulfill this need. However, veteran's access to AL is limited because it is traditionally private pay; state financial assistance or Medicaid are available but largely insufficient, and fewer than 7% of veterans have long-term care insurance to support AL and other care options. Because the VA does not pay for AL, many veterans have no recourse other than to live in nursing homes even if they do not require ongoing and more costly nursing care.

By establishing a three-year pilot program for veterans to receive AL paid by the VA, the Expanding Veterans' Options for Long Term Care Act would allow aging veterans to live more independently while receiving the level of care that most appropriately fits their needs. This intent is in line with CEAL@UNC's vision that all people have access to person-centered AL options in which to live, age, visit, and work with dignity. We applaud your dedication to veterans -- an underserved AL population who deserve dignity, respect, and compassion in their health and personal care.

Sincerely,



Sheryl Zimmerman, PhD, University Distinguished Professor  
Co-Director, Program on Aging, Chronic Illness, and Long-Term Care  
Executive Director, Center for Excellence in Assisted Living  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill