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CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

POLICY ANALYSIS

Saving Our Veterans Lives Act of 2025 (S.926)

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The rate of suicide among veterans continues to exceed that of the civilian population. The Department of Veterans Affairs' 2024 [National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#) shows that in 2022, firearms were involved in 73.5% of veteran suicide deaths compared to 52.2% among non-veterans. However, numerous initiatives, targeted interventions, and financial investments across the public and private sectors are laying the groundwork for progress and continue to improve outcomes over time with sustained execution. Addressing this crisis requires innovative, multifaceted, and evidence-based solutions that intervene before a crisis becomes fatal.

The proposed legislation, [Saving Our Veterans' Lives Act of 2025](#), marks a significant, evidence-based step forward in federal efforts to prevent veteran suicide by emphasizing lethal means safety and responsible firearm ownership. This legislation directly addresses the disproportionate rate of firearm-related suicides among veterans by creating a new, comprehensive program within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It would authorize the VA to play a

proactive role in prevention by requiring the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (SecVA) to provide eligible individuals, upon request, with either a secure storage item for firearms—such as gun safes or lockboxes—or a redeemable voucher for a storage solution that fits their needs. To ensure broad and efficient distribution, the VA may partner with organizations that specialize in secure firearm storage devices, and all recipients will receive information about the importance and life-saving benefits of secure storage.

Additionally, the proposed legislation includes a detailed Rule of Construction that explicitly protects the lawful ownership of firearms, assuring veterans that participation in the program will not lead to the collection of personally identifiable information for firearm tracking, will not require firearm registration with any government entity, will not mandate firearm storage, and cannot be interpreted as discouraging lawful ownership or possession of a firearm.

The bill would authorize a \$5 million appropriation each year for the VA from fiscal years 2026 through 2036.

Outreach and Education

The Saving Our Veterans Lives Act of 2025 establishes essential components for both program dissemination and integration. To maximize outreach, the bill directs VA to launch a public education campaign to inform veterans about the program's availability and permits partnerships with experts in secure storage. The program will be incorporated into broader veteran suicide prevention efforts, requiring VA to develop and release an informational video on secure firearm storage that is explicitly framed as a suicide prevention strategy and produced in collaboration with VA's existing suicide prevention partner organizations.

Who is eligible

The proposed policy applies to individuals falling under two primary categories:

Category 1: Veterans as defined in 38 U.S.C. 101

Category 2: Former Military Members as defined under 38 U.S.C. 1720I(b), provided they meet all the following sub-criteria:

- Discharge Status: Discharged under a condition that is neither honorable nor dishonorable, nor a discharge by court-martial.
- Enrollment Status: Not currently enrolled in the general VA health care system established by 38 U.S.C. 1705
- Service Criteria (Must meet one of the following):
 - > Served more than 100 cumulative days and were deployed to a combat or hostile area, including operating an unmanned aerial vehicle remotely.
 - > While serving, they were the victim of a physical assault of a sexual nature, a battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment.

Measuring Success

To ensure accountability and transparency, SecVA will be required to submit annual reports to Congress detailing the execution of the secure storage program. These reports must include specific metrics for evaluating the program's reach and effectiveness, such as tracking the number of items distributed through Veterans Health Administration (VHA) channels and external partners. The reports should also include an assessment of the efforts made and the obstacles faced in reaching eligible veterans who are not currently enrolled in VA care.

Our team at A-G Associates' Military, Veteran & Family Center of Excellence (MVF COE) understands that meaningful evaluation must go beyond simply counting distributions and instead focus on key public health outcomes. The most important indicator of success is a measurable decrease in the veteran firearm suicide rate, since firearm use accounts for about 74% of veteran suicide deaths. However, proxy measures can also assist in assessing the program's impact, including:

Change in Self-Reported Secure Storage Practices. Evaluating the rise in the percentage of veterans who report storing their firearms securely, such as locking them at home or using out-of-home storage programs, is an important indicator of success. This measures whether the intervention effectively promotes secure practices as a normal and habitual part of firearm ownership, thereby influencing how the community talks about and handles storage.

Uptake in Out-of-Home Storage Programs. Tracking the growth and usage of partnered programs that provide temporary, secure out-of-home storage for at-risk veterans will show acceptance of the most comprehensive safety measure during a crisis.

Our Key Considerations

A major policy challenge to promoting secure firearm storage is the worry that it reduces an owner's immediate threat readiness. To address this, secure storage should be framed as a way to improve control and dependability, not as a trade-off. This is an extension of core military weapons-handling principles: maintaining control, accountability, and disciplined access.

By prioritizing the subsidized distribution of biometric or quick-access containers that support near-instantaneous retrieval, our team — combining professional expertise with lived experience and strong ties to the military and veteran community — believes we can reframe this technology as a strategic and well-received part of a personal self-defense plan. This approach also protects others in the household, including children and other vulnerable individuals, from accidental injury, unauthorized access, or self-harm.

Additionally, policy initiatives should require the inclusion of rapid access techniques in standard firearm proficiency training. Communication from trusted messengers among firearm owners, such as the National Shooting Sports Foundation, must emphasize that securing the weapon protects the firearm's integrity and reliability for the owner when a genuine threat arises. This strategic approach effectively balances the owner's need for readiness with the importance of lethal means safety.



About the Author

Mackenzie Witt is an experienced research and policy analyst with nearly two decades of experience serving and working in military and veteran communities.

At [A-G Associates](#), her work supports VA and DoD suicide prevention initiatives. Mackenzie's ability to dissect complex legislative and policy issues has earned her recognition within the military and veteran communities. She served in the United States Marine Corps as a cryptologic linguist.

Turn Policy into Impact

The passage of the proposed Saving Our Veterans Lives Act of 2025 is just the first step: Successful implementation is the mission. The legislation will require VA to build a comprehensive program from the ground up by establishing supply chains, forming strategic partnerships, developing an evidence-based public education campaign, and designing an accountable evaluation framework.

The MVF COE stands ready to support this effort. Our team combines lived experience, clinical expertise, public health strategy, and federal program experience, all of which has led to deep credibility within the military and veteran community. Understanding the operational, cultural, and communication challenges involved in scaling secure firearm storage initiatives will play a critical role in driving immediate and measurable impact.

As the VA begins implementing this legislation, the MVF COE is eager to initiate partnerships with federal, state, community, and industry stakeholders to prepare for the nationwide rollout. We welcome collaboration and discussion with organizations and individuals committed to reducing veteran suicide, advancing secure storage access, and developing innovative, evidence-based approaches to lethal means safety.

Partner With Us

The MVF COE envisions a future where every service member, veteran, and family can thrive in healthy, connected, and supportive communities. Let's build solutions **together**.



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