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# U.S. House of Representatives Votes to Increase Pay of Virgin Islands Service Members

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett announced late Thursday that through efforts led by her office, the U.S. House of Representatives have voted to increase the pay of Virgin Islands service members.

The increase came as part of the passage of H.R.7900, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2023. Along with providing the raise for U.S. Virgin Islanders service members, H.R. 7900 also bolsters America's national security and promote U.S. leadership on the global stage, Ms. Plaskett said.

"Passed annually by Congress since 1961, the NDAA authorizes funding levels for the Department of Defense," she said. "This legislation allows the Armed Forces to pay, train and

equip U.S. service members; support America's allies around the world; and carry out essential national security operations. This legislation also includes initiatives to support cutting-edge research at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, expand our military's talent pipeline and bolster the security of our supply chains. Amid the rising threat of tyranny, House Democrats remain committed to keeping Americans safe and upholding our most cherished values around the world."

With this year's NDAA, House Democrats have advanced a range of key national security priorities:

- **A raise for U.S. Virgin Islands service members**, including a 4.6 percent pay increase for uniformed and civilian personnel, 2.4 percent inflation bonuses for service members earning less than \$45,000 per year and a \$15 per hour minimum wage for federal contract workers.
- **Support for the people of Ukraine**, including \$1 billion for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) and additional efforts to reduce U.S. dependence on Russian energy.
- **Resources for minority serving institutions**, including more than \$111 million in HBCU research funding and a pilot program to increase research capacity at MSIs.
- **Investments in next-generation defense technology**, including \$275 million to fund advances in hypersonics, electronic warfare and artificial intelligence.
- **Civilian harm mitigation measures**, including the establishment of a Commission on Civilian Harm and a Center for Excellence in Civilian Harm Mitigation.
- **Improvements to supply chain security**, including an assessment of dual-use technology and strengthened risk management for pharmaceutical supply chains.
- **Expanded cooperation with U.S. allies**, including anti-trafficking and climate resilience efforts.

Additionally, this year's NDAA also contained the following amendments for the U.S. territories sponsored by Congresswoman Plaskett:

- Amendment to require a Department of Defense report to Congress on U.S. military capabilities in the Caribbean basin, particularly in and around the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Such report would have to include an assessment of the value, feasibility, and cost of increasing U.S. capabilities in the Caribbean to:

- Combat transnational criminal organizations and illicit narcotics and weapons trafficking in the Caribbean;
- Improve surveillance capabilities and maximize the effectiveness of counter-trafficking operations in the Caribbean;
- Ensure that U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command have the necessary assets to support and increase measures to detect, interdict, disrupt, or curtail illicit narcotics and weapons trafficking activities;
- Respond to malign influences of China and Russia in the Caribbean;
- Increase supply chain resiliency and near-shoring in global trade; and

- Strengthen the ability of the security sector to respond to, and become more resilient in the face of, major disasters, including to ensure critical infrastructure and ports can come back online rapidly following disasters.

The report would also have to include an assessment of United States military force posture in the Caribbean.

- Amendment to require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish the Advisory Committee on United States Outlying Areas to provide advice and guidance to the VA on matters relating to veterans residing in U.S. territories, including the Virgin Islands. Among other duties, the committee must advise the VA on how to improve its programs and services to better serve veterans living in the listed areas.

A companion bill must now be taken up and passed by the Senate before it gets to the president's desk for signature into law, Ms. Plaskett said. The Senate will take up its version in the coming months and the two versions, both from the House and the Senate, will likely go to conference. One final version will be negotiated, then head to the president's desk.

In addition, yesterday the House of Representatives passed a major, historic piece of separate legislation for our veterans, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act ([S.3373](#)). The bill makes veterans who during their military service were exposed to burn pits or other toxic substances automatically eligible for VA health care and disability benefits if they develop any of almost two dozen illnesses, conditions and categories of cancer specified by the bill, according to Ms. Plaskett's office.

This veteran's bill also includes Ms. Plaskett's amendment to require a Government Accountability Office study and report on access and barriers to veterans benefits and services for veterans in territories of the United States.

You may follow the progress of [H.R. 7900](#) and [S.3373](#) by clicking each bill number.