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WASHINGTON – The long drive to Massachusetts or Vermont for medical service would become a thing of the past under a House bill introduced today by New Hampshire's two U.S. Representatives. Congressmen Frank Guinta and Charles F. Bass are co-sponsoring H.R. 1863, the Veterans Health Equity Act of 2011. It requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a full-service hospital for military veterans in New Hampshire, or to make sure that comparable services are provided by contracting with in-state hospitals.

New Hampshire is currently the only state that does not have an in-state, full-service veterans hospital.

"We cannot turn our back on the men and women who answered when their country called," Guinta said. "A promise made is a promise kept. It is especially unfair, given New Hampshire's large veteran population. It's just not right to ask those who have worn the uniform to get on a shuttle and spend hours travelling out of state, sometimes on treacherous wintery roads, and then sit in a waiting room for several more hours just to get the treatment they should have received at home. We must make this right, and this bill accomplishes that."

Bass said, "It is unacceptable that the nearly 130,000 veterans living in the Granite State do not have access to full hospital services in their home state. Those who have served our nation deserve our greatest appreciation – they do not deserve to spend hours traveling to Boston or White River Junction for care they should be able to receive closer to home. I look forward to working with my colleagues to move this critical legislation forward."

Similar legislation has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Kelly Ayotte.

The VA Medical Center at Manchester was downsized from a full-service hospital more than a decade ago. Last year, on average, 230 veterans a month had to go to Boston for medical specialties not offered at Manchester. Veterans can receive transport upon request by volunteer veteran service groups, but visits often take an entire day and can involve driving during rush-hour.

The bill now goes to the House Veterans Affairs Committee for consideration.

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