

VSOs Deliver Petition Urging Expanded Caregiver Benefits

VFW joins in delivering 182K-signature petition to Congress urging the passage of a bill that will expand caregiver benefits to severely disabled veterans of all generations

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WASHINGTON – The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW), DAV (Disabled American Veterans), the American Legion and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) today delivered a petition with more than 182,000 signatures calling upon Congress to expand the Department of Veteran Affairs' (VA) comprehensive caregiver assistance benefits to disabled veterans of all eras. They were joined by Senate and House members also calling on their colleagues to pass caregiver extension legislation.

The bipartisan “Caring for our Veterans Act of 2017,” passed by the Senate VA Committee last week, includes a critical provision modeled after a bill authored by Senator Patty Murray that would extend comprehensive VA caregiver benefits to veterans severely injured during and prior to the Vietnam War. Following a two-year period, the program would expand to include veterans of all eras.

The bill now awaits passage in the full Senate and would then require passage in the House.

“Caregivers of military veterans, the overwhelming majority of whom are family members, put their lives and careers on hold, often accepting great emotional and financial burdens to ensure their veterans have a meaningful quality of life and stay in their homes instead of having to receive institutional nursing home care,” said Bob Wallace, VFW’s Assistant Adjutant General and Executive Director, Washington Office. “The family caregivers of post-9/11 veterans are eligible for comprehensive support to include a living stipend to alleviate

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the financial burden of being a full-time caregiver. Unfortunately, veterans of previous eras are unjustifiably denied eligibility simply based on the era in which they served. It's past time Congress end this inequity and expand comprehensive caregiver benefits to veterans of all eras."

"Enacting this legislation would be life-changing for countless veterans and caregivers across the country, affording them the opportunity to remain in their homes and enabling them to have the best possible quality of life," said DAV Past National Commander and quadruple amputee Dave Riley, whose spouse Yvonne sacrificed her career to become his full-time caregiver. "We urge continued bipartisan support to get this bill passed, as it stands to vastly improve the lives of the nation's veterans and America's unsung heroes—their caregivers."

"Taking care of our veterans means taking care of the people who help make their recovery possible, but too often the sacrifice many caregivers make to provide vital day-to-day care for our wounded veterans goes unnoticed," said Senator Murray, a senior member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. "While our work to fulfill our promise to our veterans is far from over, I'm proud of our bipartisan efforts to strengthen and expand the proven caregivers program so that veterans of all eras have the resources and support they need live healthy, independent lives."

"Through this legislation, we want to make sure that veterans will be able to seek care in their own communities while also making important investments in the VA," said Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson. "This bill contains an important provision to expand the VA's comprehensive caregiver benefits to all eras of veterans. I'm proud of what we have accomplished in the Caring for Our Veterans Act."

"Veterans' caregivers are unsung heroes who have committed their lives to helping veterans who have sacrificed so much in the line of duty," said Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Jon Tester. "Thanks to our friends at DAV, the American Legion, PVA and VFW for their support and input on our bipartisan Caring for Our Veterans Act, which will expand the VA's caregiver support program to veterans of all eras, giving crucial support to Vietnam, Korea and World War II-era veterans and their loved ones who put their lives on hold to care for them. By working together, I believe that we can pass legislation to expand these critical support services for caregivers of veterans of all eras."

"We have a responsibility to support our veterans by providing assistance to the dedicated

family members who care for them,” said Representative Jim Langevin, a sponsor of caregiver legislation. “I’m proud to join my colleagues in bipartisan and bicameral support of the Caring for our Veterans Act, which will expand critical caregiver benefits to disabled veterans from all conflicts. I hope the Senate markup will be followed by swift passage in both chambers to ensure that family caregivers get the resources they need to provide our brave service members with quality health care at home.”

“The passage of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 was an important step in ensuring caregivers receive the resources they deserve so they can provide the best possible care to their loved ones. However, by limiting program eligibility to caregivers of post-9/11 veterans, an inequity was created between caregivers of the newest generation of veterans and countless caregivers who provide care to veterans of previous conflicts. It is past due for us to address and fix this unfairness,” said House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Ranking Member Tim Walz.

“The American Legion has long advocated for expanding eligibility and ending the obvious inequity among caregiver benefits. Simply put, a veteran is a veteran, and all veterans should receive the same level of benefits for equal service. We strongly support the Caring for our Veterans Act of 2017,” said Ralph Bozella, Chairman, National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, the American Legion.

“Representing the population of veterans with the most catastrophic injuries, who require some of the most intensive and expensive institutional care, Paralyzed Veterans of America understands better than most that caregivers are essential to our members’ longevity and quality of life,” said PVA Interim Executive Director Carl Blake. “There is simply no justifiable reason that our government should not provide their caregivers with the means to care for them at home with family, and the opportunity to live more normal lives, while also delaying the costs of institutional care. This should not be a debate about the era of service, it’s part of our country’s responsibility to care for the injured men and women who wore the uniform.”

Under current law, only veterans injured after September 11, 2001, are eligible for comprehensive caregiver benefits and supports through the Department of Veterans Affairs, and expansion would benefit hundreds of thousands of dedicated caregivers, many of whom have performed their role without support for decades.

About the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW):

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is the nation's largest and oldest major war veterans organization. Founded in 1899 and chartered by Congress in 1936, the VFW is comprised entirely of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. With nearly 1.7 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in more than 6,500 Posts worldwide, the nonprofit veterans service organization is proud to proclaim "NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS" than the VFW, which is dedicated to veterans' service, legislative advocacy, and military and community service programs. For more information or to join, visit our website at www.VFW.org.

About DAV:

DAV empowers veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. It is dedicated to a single purpose: fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served. DAV does this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them; fighting for the interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill; providing employment resources to veterans and their families and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life. DAV, a nonprofit organization with 1.3 million members, was founded in 1920 and chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1932. Learn more at www.dav.org.

About American Legion:

The nation's largest wartime veterans organization, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans care and rehabilitation, Americanism and youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through nearly 14,000 posts across the nation.

About Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans):

Paralyzed Veterans of America is the only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated solely for the benefit and representation of veterans with spinal cord injury or disease. For 70 years, Paralyzed Veterans has ensured that veterans have received the benefits earned through their service to our nation; monitored their care in VA spinal cord injury units; and funded research and education in the search for a cure and improved care for individuals with paralysis. With more than 70 offices and 34 chapters, Paralyzed Veterans serves veterans, their families and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Learn more at www.pva.org.

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