DAV supports legislation to improve veteran caregiver benefits, programs

DAV supports two pieces of legislation—introduced in both the House and the Senate—that would improve the current Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

The Transparency and Effective Accountability Measures for Veteran Caregivers Act, or TEAM Veteran Caregivers Act (S. 2216), was introduced in the Senate during the 116th Congress and would improve current policies by fully incorporating family caregivers within a veteran’s care team, help establish clear standards for VA decision-making and communicating those decisions, and provide a smoother transition for veterans and family caregivers along the program’s continuum of care.

The TEAM Veteran Caregivers Act would require the VA to recognize and record all severely injured veterans’ family caregivers and require a minimum standard of information when decisions to disrupt or terminate caregiver supports are made. In addition, the bill would ensure family caregiver support is extended for at least 90 days after discharge from the program to ease transition.

“Family caregivers are the unsung heroes for thousands of severely injured veterans, as they not only perform complex medical and personal care tasks but are often the lifeline of many ill and injured veterans to lead dignified and independent lives,” said National Legislative Director Joy
Ilem. “However, mismanagement of the VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers has, in far too many instances, caused the improper disruption or termination of benefits family caregivers need to support their veteran.”

In the House, legislation has been introduced that would amend the law to allow the VA to assist caregivers who support the needs of veterans with serious illnesses related to military service.

The Support Our Services to Veterans Caregivers Act, or SOS Veterans Caregivers Act (H.R. 4451), requires the VA to provide benefits to thousands of caregivers assisting veterans with serious illness, a long-standing priority for DAV.

Under the VA’s current program, caregivers of seriously injured veterans are provided assistance with training and technical support to manage their loved ones’ care needs, but that benefit doesn’t apply to veterans who become dependent on others due to illnesses such as Lou Gehrig’s disease (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS), cancer or other devastating illnesses due to toxic and environmental exposures in the military.

“This bill would authorize the VA to give the caregivers of veterans with devastating illnesses the same supports for which caregivers of veterans with severe injuries are already eligible,” said Ilem. “Veterans who are seriously injured or made ill due to their service deserve equitable care and benefits—for themselves and their caregivers.”

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