DAV supports legislation to improve veteran caregiver benefits, programs

Despite passage of provisions to expand the VA’s caregiver program to all generations as part of the VA MISSION Act in 2018, the fight is far from over to help support those who care for our nation’s veterans.

DAV supports two pieces of legislation—introduced in both the Senate and the House—that would, respectively, improve the current Department of Veterans Affairs Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program and open eligibility to even more seriously disabled veterans.

S.2216—the Transparency and Effective Accountability Measures for (TEAM) Veteran Caregivers Act—was introduced last year and would improve current policies by fully incorporating family caregivers within the 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.

A 2018 report by the VA’s Office of the Inspector General revealed the VA is not sufficiently recognizing that caregivers often provide complex medical and personal care tasks for severely injured veterans every day, and that the VA does not adequately communicate why caregivers and veterans are discharged or downgraded from the caregiver support program.
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 supports are extended for at least 90 days after being discharged from the program to ease their transition.

“Family caregivers are the unsung heroes for thousands of severely injured veterans, providing a lifeline so they may lead dignified and independent lives,” said National Legislative Director Joy Ilem. “However, mismanagement of the VA’s Comprehensive Family Caregivers Support Program 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 are supporting the needs of veterans with serious illnesses related to military service.

H.R. 4451—Support Our Services (SOS) to Veterans Caregivers Act—requires the VA to provide benefits to thousands of caregivers assisting veterans with serious illness, rather than injury, 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 amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s disease), 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.”

You can follow along with updates to this and other legislation affecting veterans and their families by joining DAV’s Commander’s Action Network (DAV CAN) at davcan.org.