

### The Situation

- To recognize and assist family caregivers who play a critical role in caring and supporting veterans severely injured in the line of duty, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) provides caregiver assistance, including access to health coverage, respite care to avoid caregiver burnout, caregiver training, modest stipends to offset the financial impact of caregiving, and other forms of support.
- The MISSION Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-182) expanded access to PCAFC to family caregivers of veterans severely injured before September 11, 2001, and was to be carried out in two phases starting on October 1, 2019, when a new information technology system to support the program was in place.
- While VA did opt to include service-connected illness as well as injury in their final regulations for eligibility for PFCAC in line with DAV's recommendation, ongoing delays in certifying and implementing the IT system required to administer the program has meant the first phase of veterans (those injured or made ill prior to May 7, 1975) were only made eligible as of October 1, 2020—one full year later than planned.
- In 2020, the TEAM Caregiver Act was signed into law, requiring the VA to formally recognize caregivers of disabled veterans in patients' electronic health records, including those caregivers who provide personal care services under PFCAC.

### The Challenge

- The VA had originally proposed a two-year gap between expansion phases, with the second phase (those injured or made ill between May 7, 1975 and September 11, 2001) beginning on October 1, 2021.
- Due to VA's delays expanding to phase one, the new projected start for phase two is October 1, 2022, meaning veterans and their caregivers will be forced to wait an additional year before applying for this critical support program despite VA having adequate technical and staff resources to accept new enrollees and deliver program services.

### The Solution

- VA should immediately begin hiring additional caregiver program personnel in order to expand PFCAC to phase two veterans and caregivers as soon as possible, but no later than the original intended date of October 1, 2021.
- Congress must hold VA accountable to fully and faithfully implement the improvements and expansion of PCAFC mandated by the MISSION Act to all severely injured veterans without more unnecessary delays.