

Open Letter to Every Member of the United States Senate and House of Representatives:

On behalf of the millions of veterans we represent, including their families and survivors, we write to urge you to enact legislation that would strengthen and expand eligibility for the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

In 2010, the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act (Public Law 111-163) was enacted to provide comprehensive support to caregivers of veterans severely injured or disabled after September 11, 2001. We believe this program has proven its value to thousands of post-9/11 veterans and their caregivers, yet not all severely ill and injured veterans have been made eligible for this resource because their service took place before September 11, 2001.

We believe it is in the best interest of America's veterans to expand the program of comprehensive assistance of family caregivers to all severely disabled veterans. Research by the RAND Corporation, funded through a grant from the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, shows that military and veteran caregivers contribute \$14 billion as an unpaid, voluntary workforce. If we don't come to the aid of these caregivers, this crucial support system for all our ill and injured veterans is at extreme risk and is, simply put, unsustainable.

VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin's testimony in March before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs illustrates this when he said, "I do believe it needs to be for all veterans, particularly our older veterans who want to stay at home, and then maybe they wouldn't have to leave their home and [go] into an institution." Correcting the existing inequity for pre-9/11 veterans and their caregivers would not only be the morally right thing to do, it would also be the financially responsible course of action.

It's been shown that family caregivers reduce overall health care costs by minimizing medical complications and lowering the number of hospital admissions. According to a recent VA report to Congress, the average cost per veteran per year for the comprehensive caregiver program is \$36,770, whereas VA annually spends \$332,756 on average to care for a veteran in a VA nursing home, \$88,571 in a community nursing home and \$45,085 in a State Veterans Home.

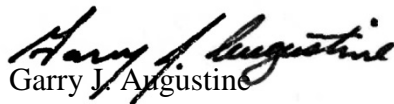
As you may be aware, in addition to our efforts to expand access to comprehensive caregiver supports, we have been working to improve the caregiver support program's operation to ensure it is functioning as intended today and into the future. We remain committed to working with VA and Congress to make needed improvements and applaud efforts in Congress, including the recent roundtable discussion on April 27, 2017, to find ways to improve the program.

With the new 115<sup>th</sup> Congress well underway, we remain hopeful that legislation will be passed and enacted to improve and expand access to VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, which remains a critical priority for America's veterans and all of our organizations. The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held a legislative hearing on May 17, 2017, and considered S. 591, the Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2017, which improves essential supports to caregivers, including child care, financial planning and legal counseling, and a phased expansion beginning with caregivers presenting the greatest

need for comprehensive caregiver support services. A hearing is also scheduled on June 14 of the Senate Special Committee on Aging to examine the issues facing military and veteran caregivers.

We, the undersigned organizations representing veterans, service members, their caregivers, and their families, urge you to co-sponsor the S. 591 and H.R. 1472. We also urge the House to conduct a legislative hearing to consider H.R. 1472, the Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2017, the companion bill of S. 591. Enactment of these bills is necessary to more equitably and fully empower family caregivers of severely disabled veterans from all wars.

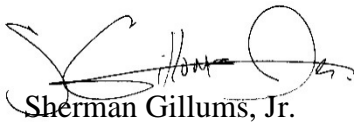
Respectfully,



Garry J. Augustine  
Executive Director  
Washington Headquarters  
DAV (Disabled American Veterans)



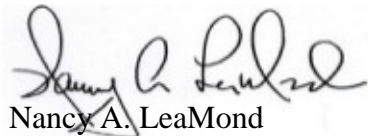
Senator Elizabeth Dole  
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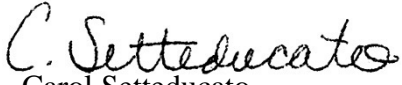
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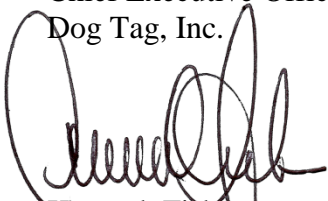
  
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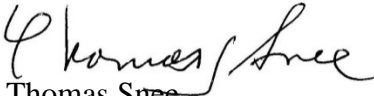
  
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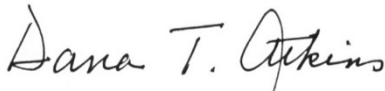


Marine Corps Reserve Association



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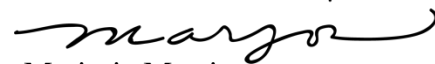
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Marjorie Morrison  
CEO & Founder  
PsychArmor Institute

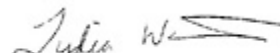


Elizabeth Chisolm  
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Quality of Life Foundation

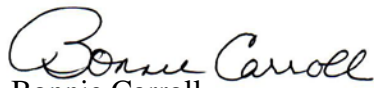
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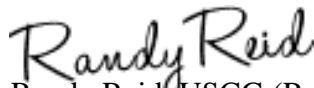
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- c: Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
- House Veterans' Affairs Committee
- Senate Special Committee on Aging
- House Military Veterans' Caucus