



Paralyzed Veterans of America

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November 28, 2017

The Honorable Johnny Isakson, Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
825A Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester:

On behalf of Paralyzed Veterans of America, I am pleased to offer our support for the draft legislation, the "Caring for our Veterans Act of 2017." This legislation would significantly enhance and reform the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and enable a single integrated community care program. We strongly urge the committee to advance this legislation so it may be enacted into law by year's end.

Since the establishment of the Veterans Choice program in 2014, VA has struggled with ever-changing program requirements enacted by Congress and ever-increasing demand for healthcare. The proposed legislation is the logical next step to finally solidify the ways in which VA provides care in the community and provide the necessary tools to keep pace with the needs of our nation's heroes.

We are pleased to see the creation of a system of integrated networks with community providers so that VA may coordinate veterans care in the community when VA is unable or ill-fitted to provide such care. This will supplement, not supplant, VA's comprehensive system of care and provide appropriate resources to address the unique needs of veterans without causing a lapse in care.

While community care is and has always been an integral part of VA, we cannot lose sight of the need to expand the capacity to provide care to those veterans without community choices. This bill improves the ability to recruit and retain providers, increases telehealth, and authorizes facility construction. Critically, this bill extends to veterans being treated in the community, the same protections that would be provided within VA if disability or health problems are incurred while receiving care.

Of great significance to PVA, and the major VSOs, is the proposed expansion of VA's comprehensive family caregiver program to veterans injured on or before September 11, 2001. This will correct a shameful inequity that has gone on for too long, and asked caregivers and veterans to endure far too much. As this legislation moves forward we ardently advocate you to maintain the caregiver provision in the final legislation.

We applaud you for your bipartisan work to ensure veterans have access to the highest quality health care in a timely manner and in the most appropriate setting. We thank the members of the committee and their staffs for listening to our input and working together to produce a commendable piece of legislation.

Respectfully,

Carl Blake
Interim Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America