



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

on

Pending Health Care and Benefits Legislation

1st Session, 114th Congress

SENATE COMMITTEE on VETERANS AFFAIRS

June 24, 2015

CHAIRMAN ISAKSON, RANKING MEMBER BLUMENTHAL, the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is pleased to present its views on veterans' benefits legislation under consideration by the Committee on June 3, 2015.

MOAA does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.

On behalf of our more than 390,000 members, MOAA thanks the Committee for its long-standing commitment to the health and well-being of our servicemembers, veterans and their families and for considering the important health care bills before you.

The following provides MOAA's position and recommendations on the following provisions:

- S. 469, Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2015
- S. 901, Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015
- S. 1085, Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2015
- S. _____, Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act

S. 469, Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2015

MOAA is grateful to Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) for sponsoring S. 469 to improve the reproductive assistance provided by the Departments of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) to severely wounded, ill or injured members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their spouses or partners.

MOAA generally supports the bill. Our organization has advocated in recent years for reproductive services, including fertility treatment and counseling for severely wounded, ill and injured members in the DoD and VA for all Uniformed Services, including the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) and NOAA Corps.

Senator Murray's bill would end a decade long ban in the VA of providing wounded veterans who want to have children an opportunity to fulfill that dream and ultimately lead to improving their overall quality of life and well-being. While the bill extends the services already available in the DoD under its Assisted Reproductive Services policy, MOAA is most concerned about fairness and equitability between the two health care systems—that veterans be afforded the same level of medical care and services regardless whether the member is seeking assistive reproductive services through the VA or DoD.

Additionally, MOAA fully supports the expansion of the current pilot retreat/readjustment counseling programs for women veterans and the program to expand child care to veterans accessing medical care and adoption assistance provisions included in the bill.

MOAA generally supports S. 469, Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2015 but recommends that VA and DoD assistive reproductive service programs mirror each other, providing the same level of medical care and services and that these benefits be extended to all members of the Uniformed Services, including the USPHS and NOAA Corps. Additionally, MOAA fully supports the bill provisions to extend women veterans' retreats and child care pilots and adoption assistance.

S. 901, Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015

Senators Jerry Moran's (R-KS) and Richard Blumenthal's (D-CT) S. 901 is a bi-partisan bill that would establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs a national center for research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of the descendants of veterans exposed to toxic substances during service in the Armed Forces.

The legislation would establish the center of excellence in a VA medical center to pursue appropriate and unbiased research on the question of the potential impact on the health of first and second generation descendants of military service men and women.

MOAA respectfully recommends substituting the term "Uniformed Services" for "Armed Forces" in the bill as defined in Section 101(a)(5), 10 USC to ensure that research conducted at a designated VA Medical Center is applicable to members of the U.S. Public Health Service and the NOAA Corps of commissioned officers.

MOAA strongly supports S. 901, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015.

S. 1085, Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2015

MOAA applauds Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Susan Collins (R-ME) for long-term persistence in advancing this a bi-partisan bill that would extend special Caregiver Act (P.L. 111-163) services and support to the caregivers of certain disabled veterans of conflict periods prior to Sept. 11, 2001. For primary caregivers, services can include training, technical support, counseling, lodging and subsistence, mental health care, annual respite care, medical care under CHAMPVA and a monthly stipend. At present, those services are available only to caregivers providing support and assistance to veterans who served after 10 Sept. 2001. The legislation would phase in veterans of earlier conflict periods based on a VA needs assessment.

S. 1085 also would provide a wider array of services for needs which may require caregiving; place greater emphasis on mental health injuries; and, remove restrictions on who is eligible to become a caregiver.

The legislation would make veterans in the VA caregiver program eligible to transfer unused Post-911 GI Bill benefits to their dependents in recognition of the fact that a spouse might now be required to shoulder primary responsibility for the family's income.

The underlying Caregivers Act enables spouses, siblings, parents and others to provide in kind the services and support once provided by the VA itself at substantially greater cost. That's because veterans with severe disabilities were placed in institutional care.

MOAA strongly supports S. 1085, the Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2015.

S. _____, Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act

The Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act is an extremely important and timely piece of legislation. MOAA fully supports the draft bill and commends Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) for championing a measure that will keep veterans safe and provide VA with the necessary tools to more effectively management pain services.

Generally the bill would improve the prescribing and distribution management of opioids, patient advocacy, and expand availability of complementary and integrative health in the VA medical system.

The bill is named after U.S. Marine Veteran Jason Simcakoski who died on August 30, 2014 at the Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Wisconsin from ingestion of a deadly toxic mix of drugs. The bill is offered to help prevent such tragic occurrences from happening in the future.

More specifically, this comprehensive bill focuses on:

- Implementing stricter guidelines and standards for management and training of opioid therapy by VA and DoD;
- Improving VA opioid safety measures;
- Establishing a working group on pain management and opioid therapy within VA and DoD;
- Conducting a study on carrying out a VA pharmacy lockdown program;
- Reporting and investigating the use of opioid treatment by VA;
- Establishing an Office of Patient Advocacy in VA to enhance care and improve awareness of advocacy efforts in the Department; and,
- Expanding complementary and integrative health research, education and delivery at VA medical centers.

MOAA strongly supports the Jason Simcakoski Memorial Opioid Safety Act.

MOAA thanks the Committee and the members who sponsored or co-sponsored the above measures. These provisions will go a long way toward improving the quality of health care and patient outcomes in the VA medical system. We look forward to working with the Committee to make these important provisions a matter of law.