

## **MILITARY AND VETERAN CAREGIVER SERVICES IMPROVEMENT ACT**

Military caregivers sacrifice greatly to care for their loved one. They suffer from worse health, employment difficulties, depression, deteriorating family relationships, and financial challenges. They are often unprepared for the new responsibilities, and support programs are often uncoordinated or do not sufficiently meet their needs.

To address these problems Senator Murray's Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act:

- Makes veterans of all eras eligible for the full range of caregiver support services, by phasing-in veterans based on need, allowing VA to manage the new workload and keep service quality high.
- Allows veterans in the VA caregiver program to transfer Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to their dependents in recognition of the fact that a spouse, who may have been unemployed or underemployed previously, may now be required to become the primary source of income for the family. Injured veterans should not be penalized because their injury occurred early in their service, so this provision exempts the veteran from the length of service requirement that would currently bar them from transferring these benefits.
- Expands eligibility for the VA caregivers program by:
  - Including a wider range of injuries and illnesses which may require caregiving.
  - Placing greater emphasis on mental health injuries and TBI.
  - Removing restrictions on who is eligible to become a caregiver.
- Expands services available to caregivers by making caregivers eligible for VA child care programs, or providing a stipend to offset the cost of child care, and providing caregivers financial advice and legal counseling. This addresses some of the top, and currently unmet, needs of family caregivers.
- Improves DoD's Special Compensation for Assistance with Activities of Daily Living by:
  - Making SCAADL benefits tax-exempt.
  - Expanding eligibility for the program by making the criteria similar to those for the VA caregivers program. This would make the program more inclusive of mental health injuries and TBI, and set a more appropriate level of disability required to be eligible.
  - Making caregivers of servicemembers receiving SCAADL eligible for a range of critical supportive services provided by VA.
- Creates a national interagency working group to coordinate caregiver policy and services among the different departments, and create standards of care and oversight mechanisms to ensure the quality of care received through private services.
- Allows the federal government to meet the unique needs of employees who are caregivers with flexible work arrangements so they can stay employed while caring for the veteran.
- Reauthorizes the Lifespan Respite Care Act and expands essential respite options for caregivers.
- Addresses many of the findings and recommendations of RAND Corporation's *Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers* study to improve and expand the VA caregiver program.