



National Alliance for Caregiving

Advancing Family Caregiving through Research, Innovation & Advocacy

The National Alliance for Caregiving Supports the Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act of 2017

On behalf of the National Alliance for Caregiving—a non-profit coalition of national organizations focusing on advancing family caregiving through research, innovation, and advocacy—we are writing in support of the bipartisan Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act (S. 591/H.R. 1472) of 2017. We support this legislation which would make veterans of all eras eligible for caregiver support services, make the program more inclusive of mental health injuries, reauthorize the Lifespan Respite Care Act, give veterans the opportunity to transfer GI Bill benefits to a dependent, and helps unemployed or underemployed spouses of injured veterans prepare to become the primary income for the family.

Over 43 million family caregivers provide much of our nation’s long-term services and supports (LTSS), permitting individuals of all ages to remain in their homes and communities, avoiding or delaying more costly nursing home or foster care placements. Financial constraints, work and family demands, and the challenges of providing care place great pressure on family caregivers. The National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP study, *Caregiving in the U.S.*, found that most family caregivers have been in their role for at least four years, and that family caregivers who provide the most amount of care are twice as likely to have been in their caregiving role for 10 or more years. Four of every ten caregivers are in what is referred to as “high burden” situations; more than nine in ten caregivers who provide 21 or more hours of care are in a high burden situation.

The recently released *Hidden Heroes*, a RAND study on America’s Military Caregivers, found that there are nearly 5.5 million military caregivers in the United States. Of these, 19.6 percent (1.1 million) are caring for someone who served in the military after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. 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. Knowing that caregivers of veterans tend to be in their role for a significantly longer period of time and have a heavier burden than caregivers nationally, it is even more important to give them information and support services as early as possible, to help reduce the long-term toll from caregiving. Better support for family caregivers is critical because often it is their availability that determines whether a person with an illness or disability can remain in his or her home.

We applaud Senator Patty Murray, Senator Susan Collins and Congressman Jim Langevin for introducing The Military and Veteran Caregiver Services Improvement Act, and enthusiastically support this pioneering approach to address the challenges of family caregivers and their families. The National Alliance for Caregiving will continue to promote this legislation and we offer our expertise and assistance in its implementation.