



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

February 5, 2014

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

Dear Chairman Sanders:

We, the undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Veterans and Military Families Task Force, are writing in support of your inclusion of the Caregivers Expansion and Improvement Act in your Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 (S. 1982).

CCD is a coalition of national disability rights, advocacy, consumer, and provider organizations. The Veterans and Military Families Task Force follows issues of concern to veterans with disabilities and military family members with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) veteran caregiver training, stipend and other assistance made available to seriously injured post-9/11 veterans through the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 have been effective and have had enormous impact for eligible veterans and their caregivers. More than 16,000 caregivers have completed the specialized caregiver training since the program was created three years ago. In 2013, the VA took an important first step by making the in-person classroom training available to caregivers supporting veterans of all ages and eras.

Unfortunately, current law restricts the comprehensive package of caregiver assistance, including the stipend, to only those veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury (including traumatic brain injury, psychological trauma, or other mental disorder) in the line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service on or after September 11, 2001. Section 304 of S. 1982 would expand these critical supports to veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty, regardless of era. We were pleased the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs favorably approved the expansion of the VA caregiver assistance and we hope the momentum for this critical expansion continues as part of the larger omnibus veterans bill.

The CCD Veterans Task Force recognizes that S. 1982 also expands and extends a number of other important VA health care and benefit services and programs. We fully support your efforts to move the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 through the legislative process and we stand ready to assist you in your efforts to approve the bill to make the veteran caregiver assistance available to eligible veterans of all eras.

The co-chairs of the Task Force will assist in any way possible to help ensure passage of S. 1982. We are Heather Ansley, 202-556-2076, ext. 7702, hansley@vetsfirst.org; Maynard Friesz, 202-403-8345, mfriesz@easterseals.com; and Susan Prokop, 202-416-7707, susanp@pva.org.

Thank you for your passion on behalf of the veterans who have served this nation with honor and pride.

Sincerely,

ACCSES

American Association on Health and Disability

American Music Therapy Association

American Therapeutic Recreation Association

The Arc of the United States

Brain Injury Association of America

Easter Seals

Epilepsy Foundation

Health & Disability Advocates

National Alliance for Caregiving

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

National Council on Aging

National Council on Independent Living

National Respite Coalition

Paralyzed Veterans of America

VetsFirst, a program of United Spinal Association

Vietnam Veterans of America