

**Wounded Warrior Project**  
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January 20, 2014

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
412 Russell Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of January 15<sup>th</sup> seeking support for an omnibus bill, S. 1950, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014, that you plan to bring to the Floor.

This legislation has a number of strong provisions (highlighted below) that Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) supports and whose passage WWP would welcome. We do ask that you act on a concern WWP raised at the Committee's legislative hearing on S. 851. In discussing that proposal to extend the 2010 Caregiver Law, we advised that --

More than two years after initial implementation, VA still has not answered -- let alone remedied -- the problems and concerns that WWP and other advocates raised regarding the Department's implementing regulations. For example, those regulations leave "appeal rights" unaddressed (including appeals from adverse determinations of law); set unduly strict criteria for determining a need for caregiving for veterans with severe behavioral health conditions; and invite arbitrary, inconsistent decisionmaking. Simply extending the scope of current law at this point to caregivers of other veterans would inadvertently signal to VA acquiescence in its flawed implementation of that law. We recommend that the Committee insist on VA's resolving these long-outstanding concerns as a pre-condition to extending the promise of this law to caregivers of pre 9/11 veterans.

We believe these important issues can be addressed in an effective-date provision. The extension can be made effective upon VA's publication of final caregiver-assistance regulations that appropriately address the issues cited above. Such a measure could be drafted to provide the Committee a period of time within which to assess whether VA has met that requirement. Such a provision would strengthen the program by helping assure that the full intent of the Caregiver Law is realized for all generations affected.

That modest change would strengthen a bill with a number of provisions that could benefit wounded warriors including measures that would:

- Provide for VA to cover advanced reproductive services to overcome a veteran's inability to have children due to traumatic injury
- Extend for three years the pilot program for assisted living for veterans with TBI;
- Extend VA's authority to support adaptive sports programs for disabled veterans;

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- Require VA to integrate complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) into the health care services at 15 VA medical centers and to develop a plan to expand research and education on integrating CAM services into VA medical care;
- Require VA to conduct an examination or seek an opinion in credible claims for compensation based on military sexual trauma (MST) to assist in corroborating the occurrence of MST;
- Authorize VA funding to foster partnerships with institutions of higher education to encourage training of clinicians in orthotics and prosthetics;
- Provide tuition assistance at in-state rates under the post-9/11 GI bill;
- Require federal agencies to hire an aggregate of 15,000 veterans to existing vacancies within five years using existing authorities;
- Require states to recognize military experience when issuing licenses and credentials, and to issue such credentials to certain veterans without requiring them to undergo further training;
- Require VA to establish a task force on retention and training of claims processors and adjudicators, with duties that include coordinating with educational institutions to develop training and education programs for members of the armed forces to be employed as claims processors and adjudicators;
- Authorize major medical facility leases VA requested for FY 2013 and 2014.

We look forward to working with you to see these provisions enacted into law, though we do have a concern regarding S. 1950's budgetary implications.

Sincerely,



for Charles Abell

Executive Vice President for Policy and Government Affairs