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Barbara L. Collura

June 24, 2015

Senator Johnny Isakson
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Isakson:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement of support regarding S. 469, the Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2015, legislation that will vastly improve reproductive treatment provided to members of the armed services and our veterans. This is incredibly important legislation for our wounded warriors who expect our government to care for them if they are injured in their service to our country. The ability to procreate is the most basic and fundamental desire of human beings. If that ability is damaged as a result of their service, then we owe it to them to provide access to medical treatments that will allow them to become a parent.

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association was founded in 1974 to provide information, support, awareness and advocacy for women and men living with infertility. RESOLVE is the oldest and largest patient advocacy organization in the U.S. and the only patient organization advocating for access to infertility services for our active duty military and veterans. We applaud the committee for discussing this important topic.

S. 469 provides for certain disabled veterans to access in vitro fertilization (IVF). Right now the Veterans Administration is prohibited from providing access to IVF, which causes a critical gap in coverage since that same benefit is offered to wounded service-members still covered under TRICARE. While the TRICARE supplemental benefit for certain wounded service-members is needed, most of those who could benefit from IVF transition to the Veteran's health system and by the time they are ready to become a parent, they discover that the VA does not provide access to IVF. This legislation will fix this gap in service and solve a major problem facing our disabled veterans.

This bill also provides for access to reproductive care for the spouse of a veteran. While the VA is not responsible for the healthcare of spouses and dependents, reproduction is unique in that male and female gametes (sperm and egg) are needed as well as a female to carry the pregnancy. Only providing care to the male or female does not work – both must be treated.

This bill also improves the current supplemental coverage offered by TRICARE in allowing for the use of donor egg or sperm, and the use of a gestational carrier surrogate, if needed. If the wounded service-member or Veteran is a female, allowing the use of a gestational carrier may be their only option to have a child that may be genetically linked to themselves or their partner.

This bill also offers an important benefit to those service-members who are deployed: the ability to preserve their sperm or eggs and cryopreserve them for later use. This is critically important as they be exposed to chemicals or toxins while deployed or be injured and become infertile. Having cryopreserved their own gametes for future use not only allows them the chance of having a biological child, but can improve their treatment options and the chance of success post-deployment.

We applaud the committee for discussing this important issue for our veterans. We stand ready to work with Congress to get this important legislation passed as quickly as possible. Our Veterans are waiting – we owe it to them to fix this coverage gap with the VA and let them access the advanced medical care that they need and so deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Collura". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Barbara L. Collura
President & CEO

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association
7918 Jones Branch Drive, Suite 300
McLean, VA 22102
www.resolve.org
bcollura@resolve.org
703.556.7172