



a program of United Spinal Association

May 24, 2013

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders:

VetsFirst, a program of United Spinal Association, wishes to express our strong support for the Caregivers Expansion and Improvement Act of 2013 (S. 851). This legislation would provide enhanced caregiver benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the family caregivers of veterans of all eras with serious service-connected disabilities.

Many families of disabled veterans play a crucial role in providing needed services and supports that allow veterans to return to, and remain in, their homes. Spouses and family members often must leave the workforce to assist their husbands, wives, and adult children in their efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate into their communities. The sacrifice of these caregivers, however, may result in lost income and other benefits, including health insurance.

In May 2010, the President signed the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-163), to provide critical supports for caregivers of disabled veterans. Caregivers for all eligible veterans who are enrolled in the VA's health care system have access to education sessions, support services, counseling, mental health services, and respite care. The law also provides certain caregivers of veterans who have a serious injury, such as a traumatic brain injury, that was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001, with enhanced caregiver benefits including a monthly stipend and access to medical care.

The Caregivers Expansion and Improvement Act of 2013 would build on Public Law 111-163 by extending these enhanced caregiver benefits to the family caregivers of veterans who meet the level of need regardless of era served. Many family caregivers have sacrificed for decades to serve their seriously injured disabled veterans. We must ensure they have the supports that recognize their sacrifice and allow them to continue to provide these critical benefits.

We commend you for your leadership in ensuring that family caregivers of veterans who have serious service-connected disabilities have the benefits they need and deserve. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 556-2076, ext. 7702 or by e-mail at hansley@vetsfirst.org, if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather L. Ansley".

Heather L. Ansley, Esq., MSW
Vice President of Veterans Policy
VetsFirst, a program of United Spinal Association

