

Congress Passes Bill to Help Wounded Veterans Start Families

WWP-Led Coalition Advocated on Behalf of Nearly 2,000 Couples

WASHINGTON, Sept. 29, 2016 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Veteran service organizations (VSOs) and other advocates are congratulating Congress for approving fertility coverage for wounded veterans and their families. Without this coverage, an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 veterans would be unable to start or grow their family due to their injuries sustained in service to our country. The passage of H.R. 5325 fills a longstanding gap in health care services available to veterans.

Due to injuries ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to damage to the spinal cord, many veterans returned home from combat having lost the ability to have children naturally. While the Department of Defense offers fertility treatment for service members injured while on active duty, this benefit was not previously available to wounded veterans. Following Wednesday's action by Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will be able to cover fertility treatments for veterans with service-related infertility.

Over the past several months, a broad coalition of VSOs and partners including Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP), Disabled American Veterans® (DAV), National Military Family Association (NMFA), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), Bob Woodruff Foundation, Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), AMVETS, Blinded Veterans Association, Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), Vietnam Veterans of America® (VVA), Quality of Life Foundation, Blue Star Families, Elizabeth Dole Foundation, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), and The Veterans Health Council joined together to fight for the men and women who sacrificed for us.

Just as our organizations have advocated that wounded veterans have their visible and invisible injuries treated with the utmost care, we joined to ensure veterans also have access to fertility treatments including in vitro fertilization (IVF) so that their injuries do not prevent them from having a family. The combined efforts of the coalition included multiple trips to Capitol Hill, a series of letters to members of Congress, as well as channeling public support in the form of an online petition, thousands of emails to lawmakers, and social media.

The coalition brought families, including Matt and Tracy Keil, to Washington, D.C., to share their personal stories with members of Congress. Matt and Tracy relied on credit cards, a second mortgage on their home, and support from friends, family, and their Colorado community to cover IVF. They are now the proud parents of 5-year-old twins. They pushed for this law to keep other families from facing the same challenges they did.

"Our nation owes these men and women every opportunity to realize the futures they had ahead of them before their injuries," said Mike Linnington, WWP chief executive officer. "Now, for so many, their future is starting a family. They answered the call to serve; we're thankful Congress has answered the call to provide benefits these wounded veterans earned."

"We are gratified Congress has approved VA coverage of IVF for wounded veterans and their families," said Joyce Raezer, NMFA executive director. "This decision not only provides needed support for wounded

veterans, it sends a signal to all military families that the Nation will stand behind them in the event of service connected injury."

"The inclusion of Assistive Reproductive Technologies in this year's Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill finally starts to give the VA the resources to help wounded veterans start and grow families," said Allison Jaslow, IAVA chief of staff. "This benefit is long overdue, but this is only the first step. We look forward to continuing to work with leaders like Senator Murray to ensure veterans are not denied the right to start a family after giving so much for this country."

"Veterans have sacrificed so much of themselves to defend this nation and they deserve every opportunity to share in the American dream they helped protect," said Garry Augustine DAV executive director Washington headquarters. "For many, that dream includes a family. We are exceptionally pleased that Congress has passed this legislation granting veterans struggling with service-connected infertility the reproductive medical coverage they require to help them restore their lives and build their families --it is simply the right thing to do."

About Wounded Warrior Project


The mission of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. WWP's purpose is to raise awareness and to enlist the public's aid for the needs of injured service members, to help injured servicemen and women aid and assist each other, and to provide unique, direct programs and services to meet their needs. WWP is a national, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. To get involved and learn more, visit woundedwarriorproject.org.

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