

29 November 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

The undersigned, a group of likeminded Caregiver and Veteran Service Organizations and advocates, held a meeting on November 22 about the very troubling reports of Caregivers at the Tennessee Valley Medical Facility being downgraded or discharged from the Caregiver program.

We do not believe these are isolated cases. Time and again, we hear similar stories from distraught Caregivers and Veterans, dealing with the day to day challenges of their disabilities, who suddenly find themselves without financial support or health insurance for the Caregiver, due to inexplicable determinations by VA officials. Often, we are told those cases are unique deviation from established VA policy. But at some point, such deviations become the norm and indicate serious problems with the execution of the program.

The expansion of the Caregiver program called for in The MISSION Act provides the Department the opportunity to rectify these problems. Specifically, we make two immediate recommendations:

- Establish, and enforce, national eligibility standards for the Caregiver program, that apply to both initial eligibility determinations and to the annual eligibility reevaluations.
- Establish a permanent Caregiver designation for our most catastrophically disabled veterans, so they and their Caregivers do not have to go through the continuous worry of being downgraded within the program or dropped from it altogether.

During our meeting, many additional recommendations were considered, and our group will continue to meet to refine those recommendations for this program. In the meantime, a copy of the notes from that meeting, with those recommendations, are attached for the Department's review.

If we can provide any additional assistance to rectify these issues, do not hesitate to contact us. We thank you for your leadership and your support of America's Veterans and Caregivers.

Very Respectfully,

The Independence Fund
American Military Retiree Association
Healing Household 6
WiseHealth/VeteranCaregiver.com
National Defense Committee
AMVETS
Sea Service Family Foundation
Veteran Warriors

TBI Warriors Foundation
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the
United States
National Military Family Association
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Coalition to Salute America's Heroes
Reserve Officers Association