

Rep. Rick Larsen (WA-02)

Testimony before the House Appropriations Committee

Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs

April 17, 2018

Good afternoon, Chairman Dent and Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and other members of the subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to address you about priorities within the jurisdiction of the subcommittee for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Appropriations.

After more than a decade of war, thousands of veterans struggle with infertility and reproductive health. In the past, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was expressly prohibited from covering adoption expenses or in vitro fertilization (IVF), the most popular and successful form of assisted reproductive technology (ART).

In the FY 2017 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, Congress took important steps to improve the scope of health care available to severely injured or ill veterans. During mark-up, the Senate Appropriations Committee overwhelmingly approved an amendment offered by Senator Murray to allow VA to use existing funds to cover adoption assistance and fertility counseling and treatment, including IVF. Your engagement on this issue throughout the FY 2017 and FY 2018 process helped ensure IVF would be available for wounded veterans facing infertility.

I urge members of the subcommittee to build on this bipartisan success. Recognizing that IVF and adoptions are both long processes, I believe extending this policy through annual appropriations is an inefficient way to deliver this coverage. I respectfully request that the committee make coverage of IVF and adoption assistance permanent by statutorily removing the prohibitions from law. And to ensure that coverage of these programs does not take away from spending on other veterans programs, I request that

the Committee increase funding in order to provide this coverage. As an estimate, the Independent Budget Veterans Service Organizations have requested approximately \$20 million to cover the cost of reproductive services in FY 2019.

America's women and men in uniform sacrifice greatly. If injured in the line of duty, they should not have to sacrifice their dreams of having a family. We are looking forward to working with you to improve the care available to our nation's veterans by extending the authority to provide adoption assistance, fertility counseling, and fertility treatment, including the provision of IVF.

In addition, I urge the committee to continue its strong bipartisan record of supporting veterans' mental health care programs, suicide prevention efforts, programs that benefit homeless veterans, as well as pain management teams and other steps to address the opioid crisis.

I appreciate your continued support for the nation's veterans, and look forward to answering any questions members of the subcommittee may have. Thank you.