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Congress of the United States
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CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE
ON AVIATION

ARMED SERVICES

May 20, 2021

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chair
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
B235 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mike Bost
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
B235 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Takano and Ranking Member Bost:

I appreciate the opportunity to share my priorities during the Committee on Veterans' Affairs Bipartisan Member Day hearing. During the 117th Congress, I encourage you to consider the following priorities:

1. Veteran Families Health Services

America's women and men in uniform sacrifice greatly. They should not have to sacrifice their dreams of having a family. H.R. 2734, the *Veteran Families Health Services Act*, is comprehensive legislation I introduced this Congress to ensure servicemembers' and veterans' fertility treatments, such as *in vitro* fertilization (IVF), and counseling are included as part of their earned health benefits.

During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands of servicemembers suffered genitourinary, blast, spinal and brain injuries that left them unable to conceive naturally. While the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) offer some forms of fertility treatment and counseling, these services often fail to meet the needs of servicemembers and veterans. These families are faced with the choice of pursuing fertility treatments before leaving service or paying thousands of dollars out of pocket after separation.

The *Veteran Families Health Services Act* would permanently overturn the 1992 law banning VA from funding IVF services, expand VA and DoD fertility treatment and counseling, and empower servicemembers and veterans to start families when the time is right for them. I encourage the Committee to support this legislation to:

- Allow servicemembers to cryopreserve their gametes before deployment to a combat zone or hazardous duty assignment and after an injury or illness.
- Permanently authorize fertility treatment and counseling, including assisted reproductive technology like IVF, for veterans and servicemembers and allow for the use of donated gametes.
- Ensure veterans' and servicemembers' spouses, partners and gestational surrogates are appropriately included in eligibility rules.

- Provide support for servicemembers and veterans to navigate their options, find a provider that meets their needs, and ensure continuity of care after a permanent change of station or relocation.
- Expand options for veterans with infertility by allowing VA to provide adoption assistance.
- Require VA and DoD to facilitate research on the long-term reproductive health needs of veterans.

2. **Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement**

The *Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act*, bipartisan legislation I will reintroduce this Congress, makes permanent two successful initiatives providing veterans with transportation assistance and reimbursement for travel to VA medical facilities.

Veterans should not have to worry about how to get to and from their health care appointments. However, travel is often a burden, especially for veterans in rural communities. I encourage the Committee to support this legislation to:

- Make permanent the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) program, which allows local VA facilities to purchase vehicles and hire drivers to transport veterans to and from their appointments.
- Make permanent Highly Rural Transportation Grants, which helps veterans in highly rural areas travel to and from their health care appointments.
- Direct the GAO to report on implementation of the bill, as well as on fraud, waste and abuse and effectiveness of the VA Beneficiary Travel program.
- Establish a pilot program to provide advance reimbursement payments for the VTS program to help low-income veterans pay for gas.
- Extend a grant program that allows Veterans Service Organizations and state Veterans Service Agencies to explore new approaches to provide transportation or travel assistance for rural veterans.
- Establish a pilot program to reimburse low-income veterans for travel to Vet Centers to access readjustment counseling services.

Thank you for your consideration of my priorities. I look forward to working with you and the Committee on these goals and other shared priorities to support veterans and their families.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen

U.S. Representative

Washington State, Second District