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501(C)(3) Veterans Non-Profit

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The Honorable Mike Bost
Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano:

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) was established by Congress in 2010 to support family caregivers who play a critical role in caring for and supporting veterans severely injured in the line of duty following 9/11. Occasionally, changes have been made by Congress to improve the program, such as the VA MISSION Act of 2018, which authorized VA to offer PCAFC to caregivers for veterans of all eras.

Still, the program does not consider that many caregivers are forced to reduce their work hours, take unpaid leave, or leave the workforce entirely to provide care. They sacrifice wages, retirement savings, and financial stability to care for those they love. The time away from their jobs creates gaps in their resumes and many lose the employment certifications they previously held. When their loved one either passes away or returns to independent functioning, caregivers need to return to the workplace and must address these issues. Also, those who were relying on the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) for their health care lose this coverage within 90 days of leaving PCAFC through the death or discharge of the veteran. Members in other insurance programs have 180 days to transition their health insurance benefits.

Provisions in the Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement Act (H.R. 2148) extend CHAMPVA health coverage, provide bereavement counseling upon the death of the veteran, and support a caregiver's transition into the workforce or retirement. It also directs studies on the possibility of allowing caregivers to make contributions to Social Security and examines the possibility of the VA incorporating former caregivers into the VA workforce as personal care attendants.

Caregivers are often the most important component of rehabilitation and maintenance for veterans with catastrophic disabilities. As a result, their welfare directly affects the quality-of-care veterans receive. PVA strongly endorses H.R. 2148 and urges the committee to pass it quickly.

Sincerely,

Heather Ansley, Esq., MSW
Chief Policy Officer
Paralyzed Veterans of America