

Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act

Congressman Matt Cartwright

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Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownlee, and Members of the Committee, thank you for including H.R. 1904, the Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act, as part of the hearing today and for the opportunity to speak to the Committee about this very important piece of legislation.

Additionally, I would like to thank the American Orthotics and Prosthetics Association as well as Senator Durbin as they have been instrumental in focusing attention on this critical issue facing our nation's veterans.

The field of orthotics and prosthetics is at a critical tipping point in terms of the future viability of its workforce and the ability of those professionals to provide the best-tailored care to our nation's service members and veterans.

In its testimony, the American Orthotics and Prosthetics Association stated that there has been an approximately 300% increase in the number of veterans with amputations served by the VA since the year 2000.

Unfortunately currently only 7100 practitioners specially trained in O&P nationwide serve more than 80,000 vets with amputations. Of those trained practitioners, one in five is either past retirement age or eligible to retire in the next five years.

However, there are only 13 schools around the country with master's degree programs in this field with the largest program supporting less than 50 students.

With the growing demand of amputee treatment outpacing the number of new practitioners trained to replace an aging workforce, it is clear that we must act now to meet our moral obligation of providing our heroes with the best health care available.

The Wounded Warrior Workforce Enhancement Act is a cost-effective approach to assisting universities in creating or expanding accredited master's degree programs in orthotics and prosthetics.

Specifically, the bill addresses these issues by authorizing a competitive grant of program of \$5 million per year for 3 years to help colleges and universities develop master's degree programs focusing on orthotics and prosthetics.

The bill also requires the VA to establish a Center of Excellence in Prosthetic and Orthotic Education to provide evidence-based research on the knowledge, skills, and training clinical professionals need to care for veterans.

These prosthetic and orthotic treatments serve soldiers who suffered limb loss injuries because they put their bodies on the line for our country, and as a result, have their lives forever changed. With Veterans Day just last week, it is a very good reminder just how much we owe our wounded warriors.

Thank you again Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownlee, and Members of the Committee for your consideration of this bill today and for bringing attention to the important issue of providing veterans with the best possible prosthetic and orthotic treatment possible.