

Sen. Baldwin: Joins effort to warn VA against limiting caregiver support services

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin urged the VA not to limit veterans' eligibility for the VA's Caregiver Program in comments led by Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Patty Murray (D-WA).

The Senators weighed in as a part of the VA's public comment period that solicited veterans and caregivers' feedback on how to strengthen and improve caregiver support services for those who care for wounded and disabled veterans.

"We are concerned that this solicitation's focus on eligibility, combined with the administration's recent concerns regarding "fiscal constraints" of the Caregivers Program, amounts to an attempt to justify cuts or changes at the expense of our most vulnerable veterans rather than an opportunity to assess the program's strengths and weaknesses," the Senators wrote. "We want to strongly caution the VA against considering any modifications to eligibility that would lead to any decrease in benefits provided or number of veterans served and urge you to consult with us on the nature of these issues before moving forward with any modifications to the program."

The following are the comments submitted to the VA:

Rather than basing eligibility off a set of types or causes of injury, eligibility for caregiver support services should continue to be grounded in the veteran's need for

personal care based on their ability to independently perform daily activities. The VA should not attempt to create a definition of veterans who are “most in need,” which would only limit eligibility. Creating artificial restrictions for veterans who already have few options for care is contrary to the law and the VA’s authority to enforce it.

The Caregiver Program was created to ease the burden on family members who provide a better environment and improve the well-being of veterans, not to replace care for veterans who need full-time, professional assistance. The VA should not now attempt to redefine the law to limit it to only veterans who need full-time care, but continue to support family members who provide the opportunity for veterans to receive care in the most appropriate setting and maintain as much independence as possible.

Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), and Bob Casey (D-PA) also signed the comment.

The Senators’ comment can be read online [here](#). Nearly 300 comments have been submitted in the month long public comment period.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).