



DoD-State Liaison Office

**OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
(MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY)**

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**Testimony Before
Vermont House Committee on Human Services
Regarding HB 343, Traumatic Brain Injury Services**

by Harold E. Cooney

February 23, 2016

Honorable Chairwoman Pugh and members of the House Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of policy language represented in House Bill 343 sponsored by Representative Grad. This language will allow Service Members and their families to retain their eligibility for and receipt of Traumatic Brain Injury services.

My name is Harold Cooney, retired Army Officer and now Department of Defense (DoD) Northeastern Region Liaison, representing the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy.

We have found that individual state Medicaid eligibility requirements, and lengthy waiting lists, hinder military families from obtaining supplemental support services for their children with special needs. This is especially true when they are transitioning out of the military with potentially uncertain medical coverage.

The Department of Defense established the TRICARE ECHO program to provide \$36,000 of additional coverage for active duty sponsored family members with condition-specific needs; however, they lose ECHO support upon separation/retirement from the military.

States can assist separating Service members and their families by recognizing that the mobile military lifestyle hinders reasonable participation in state Medicaid options and waiver programs. States can allow active duty Service members to use their state of legal residence (i.e. where they pay taxes, vote, register their vehicles, hold a driver's license, etc.) to register their special needs family members for a Medicaid waiver. Eligibility status is retained as long as the member maintains the state as his/her legal residence and returns to the state after military separation.

In discussion with the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living (DAIL) we learned that to receive developmental disability services, an individual must meet a number of criteria and, if determined to be eligible, would receive those services automatically upon returning to Vermont. The waiting list for TBI services operates a bit differently. Unlike, developmental disability services, there is a small waitlist for services among individuals eligible for TBI services due to funding constraints. The policy as represented in HB343 would help those families by enabling them to earn the same priorities afforded to every state resident.

We believe this initiative is fiscal neutral in that the eligible family member would only receive those services for which they would be otherwise eligible had they remained in the state.

Since our introduction and advocacy of this issue in the states in 2014, twelve states (Alaska, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Montana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Washington) have begun providing this benefit to our military families. Another 5 states have legislation pending in this session.

In FY 2013, according to DMDC data, we do know that for all service components, nearly 498 service members separating from the military indicated Vermont as their state of residence. We do not have data to indicate how many Service members have Vermont as a state of legal residence. Similarly we do not know how many of these families have family members with disabilities.

In conclusion, we are not asking to create a special group of people in this effort. We are asking the state to maintain the benefits extended to all qualified residents, but enable those residents in the military to maintain their earned eligibility status in Vermont until they can return home to use it. The Department requests that you allow these families to apply for benefits in the same manner as any other resident of the state, without priority processing, without special benefits, and without any special treatment to convey a perceived privilege.

We thank Representative Grad for sponsoring this initiative in the House. Thank you for taking up this issue and for your consideration.

I welcome your questions.

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