



For Veterans: Deal Reached on Family Caregiver Benefits

From Army News Today, March 2009

People caring for severely disabled veterans would be eligible for a host of new benefits — including payment for some — under a compromise reached between key congressional committees, the Veterans Affairs Department and the White House.

The agreement, supported by major military and veterans groups, proposes training, education, counseling and mental health services for the primary caregivers of veterans whose disabilities are so great that they likely would be institutionalized if a friend or family member was not providing daily care.

It also proposes full-day in-home respite care for veterans so caregivers can take a break. For the live-in caregivers of severely disabled Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, the agreement provides VA health care for those who do not have other health insurance and a monthly living stipend to compensate them for what it would cost VA to provide similar care by contract. Rates would be set by VA, and would vary based on the level of skill of the caregiver and by regional costs.

New benefits would take effect 270 days from the date the bill is signed into law, a delay intended to give VA time to fill in some of the details — like how much to pay and what kind of training should be provided to caregivers.

Free medical care and living stipends would not be provided to caregivers of veterans of other eras, at least not right away.