



Duckworth, Murray Introduce Bill to Help Wounded Veterans Start a Family

April 29 2021 9:25 AM



The Veteran Families Health Services Act of 2021 would repeal VA's outdated ban on IVF for veterans with service-connected injuries and expand adoption options

– Combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), a senior member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee,

introduced the *Veteran Families Health Services Act*—comprehensive legislation that would, among other things, ensure that servicemembers’ and veterans’ fertility treatments, such as *in vitro* fertilization (IVF), and counseling are included as part of the health benefits they’ve earned. U.S. Representative Rick Larsen (D-WA-02) also introduced companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

“We must do everything we can to make sure our Veterans receive the care and benefits they have earned, and that includes helping them fulfill their dreams of having a family,” Senator Duckworth said. “I wouldn’t be a mother today without the miracle of IVF, which is one reason why I’m proud to be introducing this important bill with Senator Murray that would help modernize our healthcare systems and expand fertility treatment and counseling offerings at the VA.”

“Right now, too many wounded warriors have to front prohibitively expensive costs on fertility treatments or IVF if they have dreams of starting a family after coming home from war. That’s wrong—America’s veterans deserve better, and they deserve comprehensive health care benefits from the VA after their service to our country,” Senator Murray said. “This is not a partisan issue and moving this legislation across the finish line is firmly within our reach – getting this done has never been more important for veterans who want to start a family in Washington state and across the country.”

“America’s women and men in uniform sacrifice greatly. They should not have to sacrifice their dreams of having a family,” said Larsen, a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee. “Congress should take the long-overdue step of permanently overturning the IVF prohibition to help servicemembers and veterans start a family.”

During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands of servicemembers suffered genitourinary, blast, spinal and brain injuries that left them unable to conceive naturally. But, because of a ban Congress passed in 1992, Veterans Affairs (VA) has been prohibited from covering the costs of certain fertility services. While VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) offer some forms of fertility treatment and counseling, far too often they fail to meet the needs of these servicemembers and veterans. Today, servicemembers are faced with the choice of pursuing fertility treatments before leaving service or paying thousands of dollars out of pocket later.

The *Veteran Families Health Services Act* would expand VA and DoD’s current fertility treatment and counseling offerings and empower servicemembers and veterans to start families when the time is right for them. Specifically, the legislation would:

- Allow servicemembers to cryopreserve their gametes before deployment to a combat zone or hazardous duty assignment and after an injury or illness.
- Permanently authorize fertility treatment and counseling, including assisted reproductive technology like IVF, for veterans and servicemembers and allow for the use of donated gametes.
- Ensure that veterans' and servicemembers' spouses, partners, and gestational surrogates are appropriately included in eligibility rules.
- Provide support for servicemembers and veterans to navigate their options, find a provider that meets their needs, and ensure continuity of care after a permanent change of station or relocation.
- Expand options for veterans with infertility by allowing VA to provide adoption assistance.
- Require VA and DoD to facilitate research on the long-term reproductive health needs of veterans.

“Everyone deserves the right to a family, and we advocate every day so that all Americans can access the care they need to build their family. However, too many barriers exist for our military and veterans in accessing the family building options they need and want. That is why we are honored to advocate with Senator Patty Murray as she introduces the Veteran Families Health Services Act, a pro-family bill that dismantles those barriers and helps create families,” said Barbara Collura, President & CEO, RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association.

“Injuries, toxic exposure, PTSD and other rigors of military service can have lasting and far-reaching implications for America’s veterans, even impacting the ability to begin a family. DAV is pleased to support the Veterans Families Health Services Act, which would expand the counseling, treatment and other services VA provides, enhancing options and support for reproductive health needs. We thank Senators Murray and Duckworth for continuing to prioritize the nation’s veterans, especially those who have sacrificed so greatly in the line of duty,” said DAV National Legislative Director, Joy Ilem.

The bill is supported by Paralyzed Veterans of America, Minority Veterans of America, the Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN), RESOLVE: the National Infertility Association, the Center for Reproductive Rights, Military Family Building Coalition, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine.

Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Ed Markey (D-MA), Bernie Sanders (D-VT), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Chris Coons (D-

DE), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) cosponsored the legislation in the Senate.

See a fact sheet on the *Veteran Families Health Services Act of 2021*[HERE](#).

See bill text for the *Veteran Families Health Services Act of 2021*[HERE](#).