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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VA speeds delivery of caregiver benefits

WASHINGTON (March 1, 2011) – Thanks to its filing of an Interim Final Rule to the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Veterans Affairs has made it possible for caregivers of eligible veterans to start receiving benefits and support services as early as this summer.

The American Legion has been urging Congress and VA to make good on provisions of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act, signed into law last May by President Obama. The law provides compensation and support services to those who are caring for veterans seriously injured on active duty since 9/11.

“We’ve been pushing to get money and services to these caregivers, because many of them have given up their jobs to help their loved ones,” said Jimmie Foster, national commander of The American Legion.

Noting that the caregivers program was supposed to begin in January, Foster said VA is “acting in good faith by submitting this IFR (interim final rule) to move things along. That should get benefits to the people who need them about two months sooner.”

VA submitted the IFR in order to circumvent a standard 60-day waiting period for public comment after new federal regulations have been published. Such regulations must be published as part of the legal process for new authorizations, i.e., benefits for veteran caregivers.

“An interim final rule becomes effective as soon as it’s published in the Federal Register. The public can still comment on it, and their concerns can still be addressed in a final rule that will be published later,” said Verna Jones, director of The American Legion’s veterans affairs & rehabilitation division. “But caregivers won’t have to wait that extra 60 days before VA starts to process their benefits.”

The IFR’s tentative publishing date is May 1, after which caregivers can apply for benefits and start to receive training. According to a VA fact sheet, direct-to-caregiver benefits “should become operational this summer.”

“We’d still like to see these new caregiver benefits extended to veterans of all wars,” Foster said. “But VA’s move to speed up this process for 9/11 warriors and their caregivers is going to make a big difference in a lot of lives.”

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