

WASHINGTON – Congressmen John Larson (CT-01) and Walter Jones (NC-03) introduced earlier today the *Caring for Military Kids With Autism Act*, legislation to improve the lives of military dependents with autism

The bill would clarify that military dependents with autism have access to medically necessary behavioral health treatments such as applied behavior analysis through TRICARE. ABA is a behavioral health treatment that has shown to be effective in improving outcomes for children with autism. Under current rules and regulations, dependents receive limited access to this effective health treatment due to the cap on the amount TRICARE may pay for these services on a yearly basis.

Additionally, the legislation would ensure coverage for these services is available for dependents of retirees.

“This bill takes a commonsense approach in ensuring that the children of the brave men and women who serve in our armed forces have access to the care they need,” Congressman Larson said. “What is most inspiring about this bill is that much of the credit for its introduction goes to concerned military families who have brought this issue before Congress. It is their advocacy and hard work that has led to this critical piece of legislation.”

“Our service members and their families sacrifice everything for their country,” said Congressman Jones. “It is our responsibility to do all we can to protect these families, especially their children, by making sure they can access the best care available.”

Joining the Congressmen on the call were Karen Driscoll and Rachel Kenyon, military mothers of children with autism who were instrumental in the shaping of the bill as well as Peter Bell, Executive Vice President of Programs and Services for Autism Speaks.

“For the 1 in 88 military kids struggling with autism, the Caring for Military Kids with Autism Act is critical. Whether their soldier is active duty or retired - after twenty-four years of service, it is unfair to look my battle-weary soldier in the eyes and tell him he cannot retire because of our daughter’s autism,” said Rachel Kenyon of Manchester. “For all that our brave men and women

do to keep us tucked safely asleep at night, we surely cannot deny our military families access to the care our warrior kids with autism deserve. This Act will allow my husband to someday retire from service with pride, secure in the knowledge that his dedication to our country has earned the care our daughter with autism needs and is entitled to."

"Military families shoulder tremendous responsibilities today - add the challenges of autism and the difficulties in accessing and paying for effective treatment, and families are understandably pushed to the brink," said Karen Driscoll of San Diego, California. "The Caring for Military Kids with Autism Act will provide coverage for medically recommended services and help lighten the load these brave families carry. It is simply the right thing to do. This bill will eliminate the arbitrary dollar limitation on my son's treatment program and finally allow for our family to access the prescribed level of care my son requires as well as fulfill the promise of continued care when my husband eventually retires."

"Autism Speaks commends Congressmen Larson and Jones for their commitment to individuals with autism and their families, and for making autism insurance coverage a legislative priority, especially for military families," said Peter Bell, Autism Speaks executive vice president of programs and services. "Families across the country are literally going broke trying to provide their children with the therapies they need and deserve. The fact that our military families, who serve to protect our freedom and security, could be put in this situation is shameful."

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