

*Larson disappointed with lack of permanent fix, but will keep fighting for families like the Kenyons*

(Washington) - In a partial victory for military families struggling with autism, the final defense budget authorization for next year passed by the House yesterday includes a modified version of a provision authored by **Congressman John B. Larson** which would require TRICARE – the military healthcare program – to provide greater access to behavioral health treatment for military kids with autism as part of a one-year pilot program.

"Military families have continually sacrificed so much for our freedom, and deserve nothing less than our full commitment to them. So I am disappointed that, despite broad bipartisan support for amendments in both the House and Senate that would have permanently improved TRICARE policy for military families that have a child with autism, the final defense authorization only includes a one year pilot program to provide access to behavioral health treatment, including applied behavior analysis. The appeals of families like that of Sergeant Major William and Rachel Kenyon of Manchester, have not and will not go unheeded as we pursue a permanent fix. That said, I'm glad the bill authorizes enough funding for the pilot program to provide the care military families need next year, and I'm sure the pilot will make it clear that this is the right thing to do for our servicemen and women." said Larson. "I'm determined to continue fighting to ensure that our military families, especially those that have children with disabilities, are able to access the care their children need. I will be closely monitoring implementation of this program to ensure it provides access to treatments that families need and will continue to pursue a permanent fix in the upcoming Congress."

"I especially appreciate the efforts of Senator Gillibrand who worked so hard to get an amendment passed in the Senate," Larson added, "and also for colleagues in the House like Reps. Joe Courtney, Tom Rooney and Walter Jones who have been such strong supporters of this effort and I know they will join me in continuing to work on behalf of these families."

Specifically, the language included in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2013 (NDAA) creates a one-year pilot in TRICARE to provide greater access to a behavioral health treatment known as applied behavior analysis (ABA), which has been found to significantly help children that have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis. The bill requires the Department of Defense to start the program within 90 days and then to report back to Congress on the cost and efficacy of the program at the end of the pilot.

Currently, access to ABA is limited by an annual dollar cap on coverage and is not available for the children of military retirees with TRICARE coverage. Larson introduced the Caring for Military Kids with Autism Act (H.R. 2288) to make ABA available as recommended by doctors to all TRICARE families in response to the appeal of a constituent – Rachel Kenyon, the wife of Command Sergeant Major William Kenyon of the Connecticut National Guard and mother of two – who spoke out at an event about the many struggles that military families with children with autism face with their TRICARE coverage. The inclusion of a one-year pilot program in the conference report comes after both the House and Senate approved bipartisan amendments to the NDAA that would have permanently required coverage of ABA treatments for active military and military retiree families as a health benefit in TRICARE earlier this year.

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