

Mount Vernon Gazette

A Lifeline For Military Families

[By Chuck Hagee, Gazette](#)

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Retired military families who have children with autism will have their health care benefits protected if bipartisan legislation introduced by Virginia Congressman James P. Moran (D-8) and Florida Congressman Jeff Miller (R) is enacted into law.

Designated as the "Military Family Autism Equality Act," HR3690 will provide retired military families with children with autism the same health care benefits as families of active duty service members with children with autism. Department of Defense statistics indicate there are an estimated 8,784 retiree families that will benefit from this legislation.

"Caring for autistic children is expensive. Military families, already stretched thin by the high costs associated with the disease and long deployments overseas, are often left with a choice no parent wants to face: provide expensive treatments for their child or keep their family clothed and fed. This legislation will eliminate that painful decision," Moran said.

"This bipartisan bill to extend needed medical coverage for children of military retirees with autism is long overdue and I'm pleased Congressman Moran and I were able to address this issue together. Autism is an insidious disease inflicted upon our children and we should live up to our obligation to serve the children of those who have served this nation," Miller said.

Active duty service members with an autistic child have access to benefits through TRICARE which provides \$2,500 a month (a max of \$30,000 per year) for Applied Behavioral Analysis, a proven treatment for the symptoms of autism. Unfortunately, the day an active duty military person retires their dependents lose access to the ABA health benefit, according to Moran and Miller. This occurs whether the retirement is voluntary or forced at the end of their career obligation.

According to a February 2007 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 150 children under the age of eight have autism or a related disorder such as Asperger syndrome, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, or pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.

"All those affected by autism should be able to receive appropriate, medically necessary care. The Autism Society of America strongly supports this legislation which would provide quality care to families that have made tremendous sacrifices for our country,"

said Lee Grossman, president and CEO, ASA.

The cost savings from autism treatment is clear, according to Moran and Miller. A Harvard School of Public Health report found that without effective intervention, approximately 90 percent of individuals with ASD require lifelong care costing an estimated \$3.2 million over an individual child's lifetime. ABA therapy has been shown to be effective in reducing this cost to less than 50 percent and reducing the cost of lifelong care by two-thirds.

"Our soldiers risk their lives on the battlefield in service to their country. It is incumbent upon us to care for them and their families when they return home. For retired military families with an autistic child, this benefit is a lifeline for their child's future and the family's financial future," Moran said.

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