

March 2, 2023

The Honorable Jon Tester  
311 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Tester and Ranking Member Moran,

We, the undersigned military and veteran service organizations, are writing to ask your support of the *Helping Heroes Act of 2023*.

In transformative [research](#) commissioned by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and conducted by Mathematica, we identified approximately 2.3 million military caregiver children, or “Hidden helpers,” who everyday provide an unseen, unrecognized, and unsupported national service. Often these individuals are taking on monumental responsibilities within the family unit, whether assisting a warrior in performing Activities of Daily Living, taking care of other children in the household, or helping to manage finances.

Hidden helpers are more likely to experience isolation and have fewer opportunities to interact with peers; have difficulties expressing emotion and learning in school; experience health challenges such as stress, burnout, and fatigue. Some hidden helpers may develop an increased sense of personal strength and self-efficacy, as they are taking on more responsibilities at home.

Despite these mounting challenges, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) currently has limited authority in their ability to support children living in caregiving households. The *Helping Heroes Act of 2023*, sponsored by Senators Murray and Boozman, would start to address some of the unmet needs facing hidden helpers, requiring a full-time Family Coordinator at each VA medical center to assess the needs of veteran families and refer them to available local, state, and federal resources. The bill would also establish a Family Support Program to provide supportive services to eligible family members of disabled veterans and provide grants to local educational agencies to support the needs of minor veteran-connected students. Lastly, it would require VA to collect data on the experiences of disabled veteran families to better identify and understand their needs.

Hidden helpers have been forced to grow up fast. And while these young individuals are proud to be a part of their family and of their loved one’s service, the physical and emotional load they carry is heavier than they should have to bear. Our organizations are encouraged by this first effort to recognize hidden helpers for their service by passing this critical piece of legislation.

Respectfully,

American Red Cross  
American Association for Caregiver Youth  
Armed Services YMCA  
The Coalition to Salute America’s Heroes

Easterseals, Inc.  
Easterseals DC MD VA  
Elizabeth Dole Foundation  
Military Child Education Coalition  
Military Family Advisory Network  
National Association of Counties  
National Military Family Association  
Nemours Children's Health  
Project Sanctuary  
PsychArmor  
Rally Point  
UCLA Health Operation Mend  
United Through Reading