



October 16, 2017

Dear Representatives Brat and Titus,

VetsFirst, which is a program of United Spinal Association, strongly supports the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical research that addresses veteran-specific health issues and provides tangible benefits for improving veterans' well-being. In cases where VA research involves animal subjects, particularly when it involves harmful procedures on dogs, we believe all medical-research should be conducted ethically and responsibly, and only when it can be shown to have direct relevance to service-related injuries and illnesses.

United Spinal Association is the largest disability-led national non-profit organization founded by paralyzed veterans in 1946 and has since provided service programs and advocacy to improve the quality of life of those across the life span living with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) such as multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), post-polio syndrome and spina bifida. United Spinal has over 49,000 members and represents over one million individuals with spinal cord injuries and disorders, over 50 chapters, over 100 rehabilitation hospital members and close to 200 support groups nationwide. Throughout its history, United Spinal Association has devoted its energies, talents and programs to improving the quality of life for these Americans and for advancing their independence. United Spinal Association is also a VA-recognized veterans service organization (VSO) serving veterans with disabilities of all kinds.

There are many pressing, unique and underserved research and treatment needs of veterans living with service-related ailments like toxic exposures. We are concerned by the apparent lack of evidence that the VA's past and ongoing canine research—particularly projects involving causing dogs pain and distress, some of which is not relieved—has led to effective and accessible treatments or cures for veteran-specific illnesses. Further, any medical conclusions borne from VA research should be allowed to benefit veterans for purposes of obtaining service-connected presumptive injuries and illnesses.

As such, we support your efforts to eliminate unnecessary VA canine research that is not serving the specific needs of all veterans so that these resources can be more appropriately allocated.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions to our Director of Veterans Policy, Christopher Neiweem at cneiweem@vetsfirst.org.

Sincerely,

Ross Meglathery, MPA
Vice-President, VetsFirst, a program of United Spinal Association

ENDORISING ORGANIZATIONS (as of 2/16/18)

American Military Retirees Association
DisabledVeterans.org
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the U.S.
Military-Veterans Advocacy
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
The Retired Enlisted Association
United States Army Warrant Officers Association
Veterans for Common Sense
Veterans for Peace