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Washington, D.C. – Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) testified today in front of the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee in support of H.R. 4041, his bill to train more Federal Recovery Coordinators as recommended by the Dole/Shalala Commission.

Last week Congressman Barrow held a Veterans Roundtable Discussion in Augusta. At that meeting, the need for more Recovery Coordinators was raised as a particularly pressing issue by veterans, advocates, commanders, adjutants, and service officers from Veterans Service Organizations such as the American Legion, VFW, and DAV (Disabled American Vets).

Federal Recovery Coordinators are professionals, usually nurses or social workers, who are trained to successfully navigate the VA system of services and benefits, who develop and coordinate an individualized plan for recovery for every wounded warrior. The Dole/Shalala Commission made them a major component of their comprehensive recommendations to improve the VA.

Congressman Barrow also submitted for the record personal testimonies from returnees from the 12th District on the effectiveness and importance of their recovery coordinators. Those

testimonies are included in full below following Congressman Barrow's testimony, which is included here as delivered:

"Thank you for the chance to testify before you today.

"The most consistent and frustrating feedback I get from the people I represent is from veterans having problems with the VA. I suspect that it's the same for you in your districts. The initial disability determination takes too long. Communication with the VA can be weak. Once they're in, the system can be hard to navigate. Facilities can be too far away.

"While I can see how major programs in the VA need a major overhaul, I realize that's not likely to happen any time soon. For better or worse, the system works well enough for enough folks that the demand for a major overhaul will be a long time coming. But I don't think any of us really believes that the current system works as well as it could or should.

"The problem with today's VA is its complexity. The medical needs of returning veterans are more complex than they've ever been. And we've designed very intricate treatments and benefits and services to meet those needs. Unfortunately, it's become so complex that you need specialized training just to wade through the bureaucracy of it all. My purpose in coming here today is to promote a bill I've introduced, H.R. 4041, which will give veterans the tools to navigate this maze.

"We all agree that every wounded warrior should have an individualized plan for recovery, coordinated by a professional, who is trained to successfully navigate the VA system of services and benefits.

"The Dole/Shalala Commission calls these professionals Federal Recovery Coordinators, and made them a major component of their comprehensive recommendations to improve the VA.

"A Federal Recovery Coordinator program has been authorized by Congress since 2008, but today there are only 20 Federal Recovery Coordinators spread across the entire country, coordinating the care of only around 500 wounded veterans. My bill will increase the number of

federal recovery coordinators, formalize their training, and establish guidelines and best practices for successful care coordination.

"As envisioned and designed by the Dole/Shalala Commission, a Federal Recovery Coordinator would be a nurse or social worker with a Master's degree, who has excellent communication, leadership, and resource navigation skills. Today's wounded warrior might have a unique combination of traumatic physical injury, PTSD, substance abuse, or marital problems, trouble finding a job, or trouble reintegrating back into the community. A Recovery Coordinator acts as an 'air traffic controller' to guide veterans to the proper treatment and benefit options.

"I've submitted for the record personal testimonies from a few returnees I represent, whose Federal Recovery Coordinators have been a Godsend. I commend them to you.

"Despite its obvious benefits and successes, the program is in its infancy and needs some help in order to be all that it can be. My bill will help in three specific ways:

"First and foremost, the bill authorizes formal training for 45 new FRCs in the next three years. It's obvious that we have too many veterans who desperately need these services, but we don't have nearly enough coordinators to meet the demand.

"Second, my bill authorizes the development of specialized case management software to complement the work of trained care coordinators.

"Third, my bill authorizes the development of uniform best practices for recovery coordination. The coordinators out there today are blazing valuable new trails, but they work out of sight of each other. We need to develop and promote what works best, so that all of our wounded warriors will have the best chance of getting what they need.

"Our goal here has to be helping the veterans who need it, and to do it as fast and effectively as we possibly can. I've seen the federal recovery coordinator program in action, and I'm convinced that this really is the best way forward. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you, I appreciate the Committee's willingness to take a deeper look at this legislation, and I'll be

happy to answer any questions."

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

September 27, 2010

Dear Members of the Committee:

My husband is SGT (ret.) Darryl Wallace, an OEF veteran who was wounded June 9th, 2007 when an IED went off under the seat of his humvee. He lost both legs in the explosion, and was sent to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and eventually to the Active Duty Rehab Unit at the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia.

I am writing to you to let you know the most helpful thing to us in my husband's recovery has been the Federal Recovery Coordinator we have been assigned, Ms. Erin Jolly. She helps when the VA doesn't want to help or they are giving you the runaround. We can call our FRC and Erin can get stuff done.

For example, when Darryl was overdosing all the time and he was being put on the psych ward, he just needed help. Our FRC was able to get in touch with a treatment center, get all the information together, and Erin was the one who got everyone in the whole process to get it done so Darryl could go into treatment. He is doing very well now because of it.

If I ever have any questions about anything, I call our FRC and she can tell me the information or can find out if she doesn't know.

FRCs do not give you the runaround.

Once, my husband's VA physician told us she couldn't see him for a week, and our FRC got him in to see the doctor the same day. If it wouldn't have been for our FRC a lot of stuff would have been overlooked: pain management, his well being, and his welfare.

Every wounded warrior needs a Federal Recovery Coordinator because if they don't like what a doctor or case worker is doing, the FRC will get it done. It's a big bureaucracy, a lot of stuff gets swept under the rug, and not dealt with, but the FRC makes sure it all gets handled.

Our FRC prioritizes what we need, and gets us where we need to go, when we need to go. I have never had a problem that the FRC has not been able to solve. She answers calls after hours and when we need her. When I need her, she's there for me and my husband. She works from home on her laptop to help us.

I love my FRC and I've told them that when they've called to do surveys.

Every soldier that comes back needs one. Doctors are excellent but FRCs play a big part in the recovery too—had it not been for our FRC a lot of stuff would not have been dealt with.

Tiffany Wallace
Harlem, GA

September 25, 2010

Dear Congressman Barrow:

I believe that the Federal Recovery Coordinator program is a great program, especially for veterans like myself that do not know how to navigate through the VA system that well.

I had received inaccurate information about and was not told about VA services I was entitled to. For instance, I was told I could not get a benefit while I was an inpatient in the PTSD program at the VA until after I completed the program. However, my Federal Recovery

Coordinator told me that I could receive benefits while attending the program. This information was very helpful to me because I was able to get the help that I needed without worrying about how my family was going to maintain while I received treatment for PTSD.

My Federal Recovery Coordinator also helped me complete paperwork to start my benefits. The Federal Recovery Coordinator also keeps me informed on any updates in VA benefits and services the VA has to offer. I greatly appreciate all the help of my Federal Recovery Coordinator has provided me with, without her I would have been lost.

Karl Mitchell
OIF Veteran
Purple Heart recipient

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Contact: Jane Brodsky, (202) 225-2823

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