



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

**Veterans Task Force
2009 Annual Report**

The Veterans Task Force continued its exploration of and advocacy for issues important to veterans with disabilities and their families.

In January, the task force sent a letter to Congress urging the inclusion of veterans with disabilities in the stimulus bill's one time cash payment to Social Security recipients. These veterans were ultimately included in the provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Later in the year, the task force sent a letter of support for HR 952 – The COMBAT PTSD Act of 2009. This measure aims to improve the VA's disability determination processes for veterans affected by PTSD. The measure was reported out of the House Veterans Affairs Committee in June. Companion bills are pending in the Senate VA Committee.

In February, the task force held its annual roundtable with several national veterans' service organizations (VSOs). These roundtables serve as a forum for the disability community and veteran community to discuss issues of common concern and to identify legislation or other public policies of mutual interest to the groups.

A number of outside speakers made presentations to the task force during the year. Cheryl Beversdorf, with the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, spoke to the group in March and, in May, Doug Carmon, Assistant Vice President for Military and Veterans Programs at Easter Seals, discussed the Veterans Innovation Center and contracting with the VA. In June, the task force received a briefing on the Defense Department's (DoD) disability determination system and the military disability benefits system for service members and their families from Bob Norton with the Military Officers Association of America and Barbara Cohoon with the National Military Families Association. At this meeting, the task force learned about the inability of special needs trusts for children with disabilities to receive funds from military survivor benefit plan annuities. As a result, the task force joined with the Social Security Task Force in a letter of support for HR 2059, introduced by Cong. Bill Foster, which seeks to rectify this situation.

In July, the task force learned about veterans' specialty courts from Judge Robert Russell of Buffalo, New York, one of the first judges in the country to establish such courts. During the latter part of the year, the task force heard from Linda Blauhut, Associate General Counsel for Paralyzed Veterans of America about the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and from Dean Dwight and Esther Gomez with the Social Security Administration about SSA's Wounded Warrior outreach program.

The task force plans to convene another roundtable with VSOs early in 2010 to continue its dialogue with the veteran community and will expand those conversations to include representatives from military personnel and family organizations. This forum typically serves as a vehicle to identify the task force agenda for the coming year. Also, in light of certain issues that came to the task force's attention during 2009, it became evident that there is a need for additional understanding of DoD programs created to serve military family members with disabilities. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2009 created an Office of Community Support for military families with "special needs" and it may be useful to many CCD organizations to learn more about this office and its services.

The Veterans Task Force typically meets on the second Friday of the month from 10 am to noon.

Co-Chairs

Karen Bower, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Susan Prokop, Paralyzed Veterans of America
Len Selfon, United Spinal Association