

May 22, 2007

WASHINGTON -U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, has introduced legislation that would examine if zero co-payments for mail-order drugs would boost cost savings for the Department of Defense's TRICARE pharmacy program by increasing participation in the mail-order option.

The **TRICARE Mail-Order Pharmacy Pilot Program Act, H.R.2319**, would establish a mail-order pharmacy pilot program to educate beneficiaries and boost their participation in the mail-order option for their longer-term prescription drug needs.

Currently TRICARE beneficiaries can fill prescriptions three ways: by mail-order, directly at military treatment facilities or through retail pharmacies. Congressman Bilirakis's legislation would be a significant step toward increasing participation in the TRICARE mail-order prescription drug benefit.

“My goal is to get more TRICARE beneficiaries to participate in a lower cost pharmacy option for their everyday maintenance prescriptions. Ideally, I would like for all patients with chronic prescription needs to participate,” said Rep. Bilirakis. “The result would be a decrease in overall TRICARE prescription drug costs that could be passed on to patients in other critical areas. In order to do that, however, we need to provide an incentive and reach out to beneficiaries to show them how to participate and how they can benefit. This pilot program would do just that.”

Many military retiree organizations have already stepped forward to support H.R. 2319. **VADM Norb Ryan, Jr. (USN-Ret), President of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)**

, considers this legislation a potential victory for both TRICARE beneficiaries and the government.

“MOAA believes this initiative is an extremely important one that has great potential as a 'win-win' situation for the government and beneficiaries alike,” said VADM Ryan, Jr. “To date, too many in government have only complained about rising health costs without being willing to partner with beneficiaries to reduce those costs in mutually beneficial ways.”

The two-year pilot would include 2,000 eligible beneficiaries in each TRICARE region - 1,000 of whom would also be enrolled in Medicare Part B - who have yet to use the TRICARE mail-order benefit. The participants would have their prescription co-payment waived, receive detailed information and instructions about the mail-order program and be surveyed on the results of their participation and experiences.

The Secretary of Defense would then report the findings of the pilot program to Congress to determine if it should be continued or expanded. The assessment will examine the following criteria: potential cost savings to the Department, whether or not participants consistently used the benefit and if waiving the co-payment was a strong enough incentive to boost participation.

###