



**American Orthotic &
Prosthetic Association**

Orthotic and Prosthetic Education: Expansion of Availability of Prosthetic & Orthotic Care for Veterans

Support S. 1982, Section 322

Background

Traumatic brain injury and amputation have become “signature injuries” in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Increasing numbers of Veterans, young and old, require high quality orthotic and prosthetic care to restore the maximum possible function, independence, and quality of life.

As our population ages, and rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease increase, more and more Americans – Veterans and civilians – require the services of highly skilled prosthetists and orthotists. New technologies are improving the quality of life for patients following traumatic brain injury, amputation, and stroke. From the battlefield to the aging Veteran population at home, these medical conditions have become more complex and more challenging to treat. The technologies available to address them are more sophisticated, and require more training and experience to fit and maintain.

Recently, the entry level qualifications for prosthetists were changed to require master's degrees - at the same time that many experienced professionals in the field are themselves getting ready to retire. Providing high quality services to our Wounded Warriors, Veterans, seniors, and civilian amputees is going to require more master's degree programs at American universities to prepare the next generation of practitioners.

However, despite the demand for trained clinicians, O&P programs are not high enough profile and don't generate enough money for universities for them to underwrite sufficient numbers of programs. With a significant percentage of our nation's trained and experienced orthotic and prosthetic clinicians eligible to retire in the next ten years, existing orthotics and prosthetics master's degree programs cannot graduate enough providers with master's degrees even to maintain the current prosthetic and orthotic workforce, much less the number of clinicians that will be needed to care for young Veterans of the current wars and an aging population of seniors with increasing health needs.

(over)

Recommendation

The Senate VA Committee released a large omnibus package of provisions related to Veterans' health and benefits, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 (S.1982). Section 322 of S. 1982, see attached, incorporates bipartisan legislation that would allocate a total of \$10 million for modest, one-time grants to educational institutions to expand or create accredited masters or doctoral degree programs in prosthetics and orthotics.

We urge you to support Section 322 of the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014 (S. 1982) in order to secure/ensure funding for short-term competitive grants. These competitive grants will help to assure that American universities can deliver sufficient numbers of well-trained orthotics and prosthetics professionals to keep pace with the needs of our military Veterans, seniors, and others with limb loss or limb impairments.

The relatively small investment needed on the part of the federal government to create these small grants will be repaid through more effective treatment of patients in the VA, Medicare and Medicaid populations, resulting in fewer co-morbidities and lower costs.

For more information contact the American Orthotic & Prosthetic Association (AOPA) at (571) 431-0876 or www.AOPAnet.org.

3/21/14

S.1982

Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014

SEC. 322. EXPANSION OF AVAILABILITY OF PROSTHETIC AND ORTHOTIC CARE FOR VETERANS.

(a) Establishment or Expansion of Advanced Degree Programs To Expand Availability of Provision of Care- The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall work with institutions of higher education to develop partnerships for the establishment or expansion of programs of advanced degrees in prosthetics and orthotics in order to improve and enhance the availability of high quality prosthetic and orthotic care for veterans.

(b) Report- Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report setting forth a plan for carrying out subsection (a). The Secretary shall develop the plan in consultation with veterans service organizations, institutions of higher education with accredited degree programs in prosthetics and orthotics, and representatives of the prosthetics and orthotics field.

(c) Funding-

(1) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS- There is hereby authorized to be appropriated for fiscal year 2015 for the Department of Veterans Affairs, \$10,000,000 to carry out this section.

(2) AVAILABILITY- The amount authorized to be appropriated by paragraph (1) shall remain available for expenditure until September 30, 2017.