

Political Causes

Kaitlyn's Law could end military family's insurance nightmare

By Claire St. Amant

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Kaitlyn Samuels has made great strides since first attending equine therapy sessions at Rocky Top Therapy Center. Photo courtesy of Americans for Kaitlyn Samuels



Doctors say Kaitlyn Samuels benefits from hippotherapy, but Tricare insurance won't pay for it. [Photo courtesy of Americans for Kaitlyn Samuels](#)



Kaitlyn Samuels, the daughter of a Navy captain, has been fighting cerebral palsy, scoliosis and other complications of a rare brain disorder for her whole 16 years of life. But her battle with Tricare, a healthcare program for uniformed service members, might soon be coming to a close.

That's because U.S. representatives Michael Burgess (R-Texas) and Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas) have filed a bill to create Kaitlyn's Law. The federal legislation would make it illegal for Tricare to deny doctor-prescribed physical therapy that uses a horse as a tool.

"We want insurance, literally and figuratively," says attorney Marcella Burke. "If we had Kaitlyn's Law, it would protect her."

Equine-assisted or "hippotherapy" activities are not covered under Tricare, and Jennifer and Mark Samuels have been paying out of pocket to provide their daughter with the only physical therapy that makes a difference.

At the advice of a doctor, in 2009 Kaitlyn started going to Rocky Top Therapy Center in Keller. The nonprofit organization is a Premier Accredited Riding Center qualified through Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International.

But that's not good enough for Tricare, which has rejected the Samuels' appeal to get their daughter's physical therapy at Rocky Top covered.

The Samuels appealed Tricare's denial of physical therapy benefits. In October 2012, even though a judge sided with the Samuels, Tricare summarily denied the appeal.

With the help of pro bono representation from Houston attorney Marcella Burke, the Samuels plan to take Tricare to federal court to regain physical therapy benefits for their disabled daughter.

"We want insurance, literally and figuratively," Burke says. "If we had Kaitlyn's Law, it would protect her from whatever happens in federal court."

The bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on April 24 and has been referred to the House Committee on Armed Services. An April 26 article in *The Atlantic* called for Kaitlyn's Law to be passed swiftly.

"Every member of Congress could co-sponsor this amendment and be proud to do so," writes Andrew Cohen. "When we talk as a nation about supporting our troops, and their families, this is precisely what we mean."

Dallas CultureMap Article can be found online at: <http://dallas.culturemap.com/news/life/04-30-13-us-congress-kaitlyns-law-tricare-insurance-equine-therapy/>