

April 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer:

Let me begin by thanking you for your efforts to pass the FY 2021 NDAA, and for your continued support of the uniformed services community. I'm writing to urge you to secure passage of the following issues that are of the utmost importance to servicemembers past and present, and their families.

First, I would like to focus on comprehensive toxic exposure reform. When most people hear about toxic exposure, they think of Agent Orange and Vietnam. However, there is a significant lack of awareness of the current toxic exposures for those in uniform today and since 9/11. Among the more notable and impactful exposures are the burn pits and other fires during the Gulf War in Afghanistan and Iraq. I ask that you support expanded health care for those who were exposed, the creation of an advisory council, and the reauthorization of the Agent Orange authorities which expired in 2015. This issue affects more than just the servicemembers — it is a direct impact to the families who are or will be the caregivers.

Additionally, I ask for your support of H.R. 475, The Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act. This bill would extend TRICARE coverage for military dependent children to age 26 to align with commercial plan requirements. It is imperative that military families who have sacrificed so much in support of our nation have the same health care protections for their young adult children as their civilian counterparts covered by commercial plans. Ensuring health care access and affordability is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacts higher education and makes it more difficult for young adults to find jobs. H.R. 475 addresses this inequity and will support our uniformed services families.

And finally, I would like to voice my support for securing the Basic Needs Allowance in the FY 2022 NDAA, which would provide a monthly allowance to uniformed services families with a gross household income at or below 130% of the federal poverty rate. This recurring struggle is exacerbated by layoffs related to the pandemic, which impacted spouses' contributions to the household income. While a small number of servicemembers qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, there are many uniformed services families that do not qualify for the Basic Needs Allowance, as their Basic Allowance for Housing is considered income, so they turn to food pantries. President Biden voiced his support for this provision in an interview with MOAA during his presidential campaign.

I urge Congress to pass legislation to address comprehensive toxic exposure reform, The Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act, and the need for the Basic Needs Allowance. Thank you again for your commitment to the uniformed services community and a strong national defense.

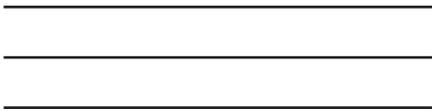
Sincerely,



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FOLD HERE 1st



THE HONORABLE CHARLES SCHUMER
MAJORITY LEADER
UNITED STATES SENATE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510



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