



T H E M I L I T A R Y C O A L I T I O N

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May 19, 2009

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman, House Armed Services Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John McHugh
Ranking Member, HASC
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member, HAC
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Skelton and Obey and Ranking Members McHugh and Lewis:

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of uniformed services and veterans associations representing more than 5.5 million current and former servicemembers and their families and survivors, is writing to recommend that your Committees include sufficient funding and support for the Vision Center of Excellence (VCE) for our service men and women with service-caused eye injuries.

Congress established the VCE in the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (P.L. 110-181). The Center was intended to be a joint Department of Defense (DOD)/Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) program specifically devoted to the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment and rehabilitation of military eye injuries. The VCE would also facilitate vision research efforts, including research on visual dysfunction related to traumatic brain injury (TBI). One of the Center’s primary responsibilities is the development of a military eye injury registry containing up-to-date information on the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up for each serious eye injury received by our nation’s military personnel.

Unfortunately, no funding was authorized for the VCE in the FY 2009 National Defense Appropriations Act. TMC urges Congress to include \$6.8 million for the VCE in the Fiscal Year 2010 Defense Appropriations Act. This funding will enable the VCE to coordinate joint DOD/VA programs for military servicemembers and veterans with eye injuries, traumas and diseases as well as coordinate important TBI-related vision screening, diagnosis, treatment and research.

According to VA research, combat eye trauma is the second most common injury experienced by military personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. The treatment of acute eye injury can determine the extent of resulting vision impairment or chronic eye disease and the associated need for vision rehabilitation, which can have long-term implications for an individual's vision health, productivity and quality of life.

The Military Coalition thanks you for your steadfast support to our women and men in uniform and we recommend full funding for the Vision Center of Excellence for our warriors who have experienced eye injuries in service to the nation.

Sincerely,

The Military Coalition
(Signatures enclosed)

Air Force Association
Air Force Sergeants Association
Air Force Women Officers Associated
American Logistics Association
AMVETS (American Veterans)
Army Aviation Association of America
Association of Military Surgeons of the United States
Association of the United States Army
Association of the United States Navy
Chief Warrant Officer and Warrant Officer Association, U.S. Coast Guard
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States
Fleet Reserve Association
Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.
Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America
Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America
Marine Corps League
Marine Corps Reserve Association
Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America
Military Officers Association of America
Military Order of the Purple Heart
National Association for Uniformed Services
National Guard Association of the United States
National Military Family Association
National Order of Battlefield Commissions
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association
Non Commissioned Officers Association
Reserve Officers Association
Society of Medical Consultants to the Armed Forces
The Retired Enlisted Association
United States Army Warrant Officers Association
United States Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States