



September 16, 2022

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman, Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman, Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Messrs. Chairmen and Ranking Members:

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of uniformed services and veterans' associations representing more than 5.5 million currently serving, retired, former service members, survivors, and their families, thank you and the Committees for your collective work in producing the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act. Your efforts support our Uniformed Services, protect the interests of service members and their families, and enhance our nation's security.

We applaud the bipartisan, bicameral work accomplished by lawmakers and staff this year – in partnership with TMC – on important legislation to ensure appropriate pay and benefits. We hope Congress will complete work on both the NDAA and appropriations bills by the end of this fiscal year, so the Department of Defense can continue its work without restrictions on new starts, expired provisions, and other obstacles that occur when these vital bills are put on hold.

We also thank both the House and Senate for reinforcing the fundamental comparability principle with a 4.6 percent raise for FY22. Considering recent inflationary trends, we also encourage consideration of restoring the 2.6 percent in accumulated losses from pay raises, which lagged the Employment Cost Index between 2014 and 2016, in NDAA 2023. Moreover, we respectfully offer the following support and recommendations for the NDAA Conference:

Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282/S. 344) – Senators Jon Tester (MT) and Michael Crapo (ID) will file an amendment to the Senate NDAA, with provisions of this important legislation. Reducing retired pay because a medically retired combat veteran receives a VA disability check is an injustice, and TMC hopes the Senate will approve the NDAA amendment and that conferees will include the amendment in the conference committee report.

Reserve Component (RC) Healthcare – Considering recent recruiting challenges identified by the armed forces, reportedly the most severe since 2007, TMC believes renewed emphasis must be placed on retention, ensuring dental and medical standards (as deployability and retention requirements) are met. As such, TMC supports the following healthcare provisions in the NDAA: **House, Sec. 703** TRICARE Dental for Selected Reserve; **House, Sec. 730** Clarification of license portability for health care providers of services under Reserve Health Readiness program; and **Senate, Sec. 702**, Health benefits for members of the National Guard following required training or other duty to respond to a national emergency.

Currently Serving Pay (House Section 615) – Considering recent inflation, TMC supports Inflation bonus pay to further assist servicemembers making less than \$45,000 per year.

Basic Needs Allowance (House Sections 601 and Senate Section 604): The Coalition appreciates the establishment of a Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) in the FY22 NDAA to support low-income service members and their families who too often struggle with food insecurity. We strongly support these versions, which improve BNA by removing BAH from eligibility calculations and increasing the income eligibility threshold.

MHS Restructuring: The Coalition remains concerned about the impact medical billet cuts and “right-sizing” MTFs will have on beneficiary access to care. We support House Sections 721, 745, and 780, that would require congressional notification before modifying the scope of services provided at an MTF, extend the report date for the Comptroller General’s analysis of proposed military medical billet cuts, and halt medical billet cuts for three years, requiring additional reporting from DoD.

Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act (H.R. 2214/S. 1669) – A House floor amendment for NDAA with provisions of this legislation was filed but not called for a vote. An identical amendment may be filed in the Senate. TMC supports this amendment’s inclusion in the conference committee report.

Retain Skilled Veterans Act (H.R. 4031/S. 2161) – TMC supports inclusion of a Senate amendment to include this legislation, which would authorize repeal of the requirement for those retiring from military service to wait 180 days before entering DoD civil service General Schedule (GS) positions for GS13 and below. TMC also supports the House NDAA’s adopted amendment (#549/sec. 1110) that excludes the 180-day restriction for service members in the medical field.

Service Member Protection Against Binding Arbitration – While USERRA affords employment protection from deployments, employers use binding arbitration, and the absence of employment protections in SCRA, to work around this and fire or discharge RC service members. To mitigate this, TMC supports **House sections 5205 and 5891**.

Skillbridge Program (House sections 567, 569D, and 569E) – The Skillbridge program – recently opened to the RCs – is crucial because unemployment is a reality for RC service members throughout their military careers. TMC supports these provisions that will facilitate and fund Skillbridge, its apprenticeship programs, and law enforcement training.

Mental and Behavioral Health Care (House Sec. 767 and Senate Sec. 746) – The Coalition thanks Congress for addressing ongoing issues with beneficiaries’ access to mental health care. We strongly support these provisions that would expand behavioral health programs offered at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and establish a scholarship for service pilot program for civilian behavioral health care providers.

TRICARE Dental Program (Senate Sec. 701) – TMC appreciates this provision, which would address current problems with the TDP network by increasing competition among carriers, but we ask Congress to monitor implementation to ensure premiums and cost shares remain affordable for all military families.

Spouse Employment (Senate Sec. 609) – TMC supports the “Permanent authority to reimburse members for spouse relicensing costs pursuant to a permanent change of station” provision, to mitigate challenges finding employment working in licensed or credentialed fields, especially after changing duty stations.

Prohibition On Considering State Laws When Considering Duty Stations (Senate Sec. 525) – The Coalition has concerns about this section. DoD historically considers Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) needs, humanitarian assignments, spouse co-location assignments, and career development when assigning duty stations. The Coalition recommends each branch work with service members at the lowest levels, identifying assignments that meet the needs of the service and service members.

Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention (House Sec. 536 and Senate Sec. 542) – The Coalition supports these provisions that increase oversight of sex-related offenses and sexual harassment involving National Guard members; and require a random selection of qualified service members on a court martial panel.

Housing and Toxic Exposures (Senate Sec. 2822) – TMC supports the “Military Housing Readiness Council,” in support of continued oversight and assurance of a high quality of life for service members.

Defense Resale (House Sec. 631) – While the Coalition supports long-term efforts to diversify supply streams and reduce reliance on products from our nation’s adversaries, we do not support this language, which we feel would have immediate, negative consequences on the quality of life of our service members, their families, and the defense resale system.

Updating Warrant Officer Selection and Promotion Authority (Senate Sec. 504) – TMC is strongly in favor of these common sense, no-cost provisions to improve career opportunities for Warrant Officers and correct omission of them in NDAA 2019 legislation that was implemented for other officer grades.

SBP Open Enrollment and Remarried Surviving Spouses: (House Sections 624 and 736): The TMC strongly supports an open enrollment for the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP); and House section 736 that would provide remarried surviving spouses access to their children’s electronic medical records.

Sincerely,



President,
The Military Coalition
cc: Members of House and Senate Armed Services Committees

The Military Coalition:

Air Force Sergeants Association
AMSUS, the Society of Federal Health Professionals
AMVETS
Blinded Veterans Association
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.
Chief Warrant & Warrant Officers Association, USCG
Fleet Reserve Association
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America
K9s For Warriors
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 Military Family Association
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association
Non-Commissioned Officers Association of the USA
Reserve Organization of America
Service Women’s Action Network
TREA: The Enlisted Association
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
United States Army Warrant Officers Association
United States Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States
Vietnam Veterans of America
Wounded Warrior Project