



**STATEMENT OF**

**THE MILITARY COALITION (TMC)**

**for the**

**SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL**

**Concerning**

**Uniformed Services Personnel, Healthcare, and Compensation Matters**

**May 23, 2022**

MADAM CHAIRWOMAN, MR. RANKING MEMBER, AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE, The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of nationally prominent uniformed services and veterans' organizations, is grateful to the committee for this opportunity to express our views concerning personnel and compensation issues affecting the uniformed services community. This statement provides the collective views of the following military and veterans' organizations, which represent approximately 5.5 million current and former members of the eight uniformed services, plus their families and survivors.

The Military Coalition:

Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)  
Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS)  
Blinded Veterans Association (BVA)  
Chief Warrant Officers Association of the US Coast Guard (CWOA)  
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA)  
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)  
Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)  
Gold Star Wives of America (GSW)  
Iraq Afghanistan Veterans Association (IAVA)  
Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV)  
K9s For Warriors  
Marine Corps League (MCL)  
Marine Corps Reserve Association (MCRA)  
Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America (MCA)  
Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)  
Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)  
National Military Family Association (NMFA)  
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association (NERA)  
Non-Commissioned Officers Association (NCOA)  
Reserve Organization of America (ROA)  
Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)  
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)  
The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)  
The Independence Fund (TIF)  
United States Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA)  
USCG Chief Petty Officers Association (CPOA)  
VetsFirst, United Spinal Association  
Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)

The Military Coalition, Inc. does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.

## Continuing Resolutions

TMC thanks the Congress and the Personnel Subcommittee for your efforts in recent years to overcome the arbitrary budget caps – the product of sequestration legislation – in favor of a more responsible approach to funding national defense, to include the requirements for our military personnel, their families, Defense Department civilians, and other critical programs. Nonetheless, we have seen a return to excessive use of continuing resolutions (CRs), which cause budget instability and degrade readiness for the Armed Forces. Thus, we begin our set of recommendations for the Subcommittees with an overarching request for a return to an on-time National Defense Authorization Act and on-time appropriations for Defense and Military Construction, and Veterans Affairs.

## Currently Serving Issues

### **Military Force Levels**

TMC urges the Subcommittee to take steps to protect the all-volunteer force as it approaches its 50th anniversary. Reduced end-strength and the declining prevalence to serve are a threat to the all-volunteer force. Undermanned units result in morale problems, affect the quality of life, and contribute to rising suicide rates. The Coalition requests the Subcommittee address quality of life problems facing the uniformed community and sustain needed personnel strengths in both active and reserve components to meet mission requirements.

### **Uniformed Services Pay Raise**

TMC appreciates the Subcommittee's commitment in recent years to keep uniformed services pay increases commensurate with service and aligned with private sector wage increases as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics through their Employment Cost Index (ECI) – currently 4.6 percent for FY 2023 (as reported in October 2021). We request the Subcommittee's support for this military pay raise and seek full restoration of previously capped pay raises resulting in a cumulative gap of 2.6 percent. Considering today's accelerated inflation, this would help sustain our brave service members and their families.

### **Basic Allowance for Housing**

Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is an essential component of regular military compensation and is applicable to all eight of the uniformed services. TMC applauds Congress' action to protect BAH in recent years. The Coalition urges the Subcommittee to continue sustaining current applicable BAH calculations for all service members and endeavor to restore BAH rates to match 100 percent of median housing costs, thus eliminating the 5 percent out-of-pocket costs to the service members and their families. This is especially important with rising housing costs and inflation since the pandemic.

### **Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention**

We want to thank Congress for continuing to ensure the recommendations of the Independent Review Commission (IRC) on Sexual Harassment and Assault are implemented and that there is oversight to ensure proper resourcing for investigators and legal personnel across the services. TMC requests Congress to ensure that the IRC recommendations approved by SECDEF and the NDAA 2022 changes to the Military Justice System with respect to prevention and disposition of sexual assault and harassment effectively meet their implementation timelines.

## Retirement Issues

### **Concurrent Receipt**

TMC supports legislation expanding the immediate payment of concurrent receipt of full military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation for disabled retirees. Specifically, TMC is seeking the enactment of the **Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282/S. 344)** that authorizes expansion of concurrent receipt of retired pay and VA disability compensation, by expanding concurrent receipt to include Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) beneficiaries who are medically retired with less than 20 years of service (Chapter 61). Reducing retired pay because a medically retired combat veteran receives a VA disability check is an injustice.

### **Repeal 180-Day Delay for Retirees**

The Coalition supports legislation (S. 2161/HR 4031) authorizing repeal of the requirement for those retiring from military service to wait 180 days before entering the Department of Defense (DoD) civil service General Schedule (GS) positions for GS13 and below. The FY 2021 NDAA included a temporary 3-year pilot program for depots and industrial activities. TMC welcomed the recent improvement, but more work needs to be done. The 180-day waiting period has resulted in a talent management problem for hiring officials who are grappling with an antiquated hiring process that takes too long to hire a qualified candidate with a current security clearance. TMC will work to include this legislation in the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to permanently authorize military retirees to transition to DoD GS13 and below positions for all DoD facilities (not just depots).

### **Retired Pay Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA)**

TMC strongly opposes any initiatives which would further reduce the value of the military retirement benefit earned after 20 years of service. The retirement benefit is the primary offset provided uniformed service members for enduring a career of unique and extraordinary sacrifices that few Americans are willing to do for one year, let alone 20 or 30 years. After two decades of extraordinary challenges in the all-volunteer force, the group that joined after the September 11, 2001, will have served their entire careers during wartime, and should not see their retirement benefit slashed.

## Guard and Reserve Issues

The Reserve Component is regularly used for operational missions making them more than just a strategic asset. As of March 28, 2022, there were 31,101 servicemembers currently activated for overseas contingency operations for Iraq and Afghanistan with a total of 1,048,100 since DoD started tracking support for these operations. In the last year, the Reserve and National Guard supported states during the COVID pandemic, while also deploying to Eastern Europe (to include Ukraine, until the Russian invasion began) and other locations around the world. The Reserve Component is a vital partner to the Active Component and Congress should man, train, and equip this part of the force as contributors to our National Strategy. We ask Congress to:

- Expand TRICARE enrollment to National Guard and Reserve members at no cost, regardless of duty status, because medical readiness is a requirement for service -- not a benefit. (10 USC 1076d)
- Ensure the time during which members of the National Guard and Reserve serve on active duty for training qualifies for educational assistance under the Post-9/11 G. I. Bill. (38 USC 3301/3311(b))
- Provide a DD Form 214 for predictable periods of service for the Reserve Components for purposes of employment, benefits, and recognition, as an accurate representation of their service. (10 U.S.C. 1168)

## Survivor Issues

Recognizing the sacrifices Survivors have endured, TMC works to improve and protect existing survivor benefits issued by the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and to eliminate benefit inequities. We ask Congress to consider improvement in the following areas:

### **Improve Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC).**

- TMC seeks establishment of DIC equity with other federal survivor benefits.
- We also ask Congress to increase DIC payable to survivors of catastrophically disabled veterans to match other Federal survivor benefit plans.
- We also seek improvement in the speed of adjudicating and granting DIC to survivors of deaths caused by service-connected disability.

**Authorization for survivors of retirees to draw full month's retired pay for the month in which retirees die.**

### **Retain survivor benefits upon remarriage**

- Seek legislation to allow surviving spouses to remarry at any age and retain benefits, to include Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP), education benefits, and medical military ID cards.
- Update the definition of surviving spouse in 38 USC § 101 Paragraph 3 by removing the "hold yourself out to be married" clause and term "opposite sex."
- Allow surviving spouses to maintain education benefits after remarriage.
- Consistent with the Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) and CHAMPVA, allow surviving spouses to retain TRICARE with remarriage at age 55.
- Seek legislation to reinstate TRICARE benefits for remarried survivors when the second marriage ends.
- Ensure surviving spouses' access to electronic medical records and referrals for their children.

## Military Families

### **Support Military Spouse WOTC**

According to DoD, military spouses have faced a 22% or higher rate of unemployment for over a decade. Moving every two to three years presents a significant barrier to employment which can and should be

addressed by adding a target group for military spouses to the Work Opportunity Tax Credit. This credit will incentivize businesses to hire military spouses, improving the financial well-being of military families and the retention of servicemembers who are concerned with the lack of employment opportunities for their spouses.

### **Housing and Child Care**

From a recruiting and retention perspective, DoD has long recognized the importance of ensuring servicemembers can count on high-quality housing and crucial services are available for their children. As such, we urge Congress to:

- Improve access to high quality and affordable childcare.
- Continue effective oversight of privatized and government owned family housing and barracks to ensure quality housing is provided, health and safety hazards are properly addressed, abated and prevented, and utility rates are equitable.
- Ensure adequate funding of Impact Aid through both the Department of Education and DoD for schools with children of uniformed service members. Oppose any proposal that would divert funds from the Impact Aid program (H.R. 5255 Advancing Toward Impact Aid Full Funding Act).

### **Military Health Care**

TMC understands the goal of the Military Health System (MHS) is to ensure a medically ready force to execute the NDS, and a ready medical force to support our armed forces throughout the world. Additionally, we appreciate the goals of MHS Reform include improved readiness, increased efficiencies, and enhanced access, quality of care and an improved patient experience for beneficiaries. However, we remain concerned that some MHS Reform initiatives have the potential to undermine these goals. TMC is also committed to working with DoD and Congress to ensure fulfillment of the nation's obligations to service members and their families, survivors, and retirees who have served a full career. As such, we ask Congress to:

- Protect the value of the TRICARE health benefit by opposing any legislation or policy change that would disproportionately increase enrollment fees, deductibles, copays/cost shares or the catastrophic cap. Seek roll back of previous copay increases for prescription drugs and mental health and Physical/Speech/ Occupational Therapy visits.
- Ensure TRICARE policy is updated to cover new technology and evolving treatment protocols as well as benchmarks established by commercial plans and other government payers, including premium free TRICARE coverage for young adult dependents up to age 26 and non-pharmaceutical pain management treatments (chiropractic care and acupuncture.)
- Ensure proposed military medical billet cuts, any other uniformed/civilian/contracted medical personnel reductions and/or military treatment facility downsizing, or closures are not implemented until DoD presents to Congress a thorough analysis of civilian care availability and plan to mitigate impacts on readiness and beneficiary care. As MTFs restructure, require transparency on access to care metrics to evaluate impact of changes on beneficiaries.

## Defense Resale

Commissary and Exchanges provide a vital non-pay compensation benefit to service members, retirees, their families and survivors. The military community consistently rank them as a top compensation benefit, yielding returns to military families and the DoD that far outweigh taxpayer support.

TMC thanks Congress for its continued vigilance over commissary and broader defense resale reforms, and we support reforms that protect the commissary benefit, the longevity of the defense resale system, its dividends for MWR, savings for patrons, customer satisfaction, and product quality. We ask Congress to:

- Preserve the Commissary benefit as part of the overall pay and compensation package, including high quality products, maintained savings, access, and customer satisfaction.
- Maintain appropriations for Military Resale programs, with proper support and vectoring of MWR dividends to ensure access to quality of life and support programs.
- Ensure any modernization efforts of the Commissary and Exchange systems in no way degrades the earned benefit.

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