



August 29, 2022

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

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

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

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

Dear Chairmen Reed and Smith and Ranking Members Inhofe and Rogers:

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of organizations representing nearly 5.5 million servicemembers, veterans, their families, and survivors, urges you to support H.R. 5758/S. 3021, the *Comforting Our Military Families through On-base or Remote Treatment (COMFORT) Act*.

Servicemembers and their families experience unique stressors related to their service. To help them cope with these stressors, the Department of Defense offers the Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC) program. The MFLC program employs licensed non-medical counselors to provide military families with in-person non-medical counseling services that are confidential and solution-focused. Unfortunately, there is a nation-wide shortage of available behavioral health professionals, and the military cannot hire enough counselors to meet the demand. This shortage is particularly acute in rural military communities where the suicide rate is high and where many military installations are located.

The DoD could more easily meet the demand for MFLC counselors if they hire from a broader applicant pool outside of the state the military installation is located in. DoD medical providers already have license portability across state lines, but this does not apply to non-medical counselors of the MFLC program. Additionally, the Department of Veterans Affairs authorizes license portability for providers who work at VA hospitals and clinics and for contract medical disability exam providers. The *COMFORT Act* builds on these precedents for license portability authority focused on military requirements and would provide parity for MFLC counselors to ensure timely access to mental health care for servicemembers and their families.

The *COMFORT Act* would allow MFLC counselors with an active state license to provide counseling services to servicemembers and their families anywhere in the nation. This authority would help ease the recruitment challenge for MFLC counselors, provide flexibility for military bases near state borders, and increase the availability of virtual counseling services. This would also allow increased flexibility to surge MFLC counselors to locations in response to local traumatic events, natural disasters, or redeployment of multiple units to one military base. Additionally, this would benefit military spouses who serve as MFLC counselors and face challenges with maintaining employment when executing military-mandated moves across state lines.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Du Teil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Jack Du Teil
President
The Military Coalition

See attached list of organizations

The Military Coalition:

Air Force Association

Air Force Sergeants Association

AMSUS, the Society of Federal Health Professionals

Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS

Fleet Reserve Association

Gold Star Wives

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

Military Officers Association of America

Non-Commissioned Officers Association

National Military Family Association

Service Women's Action Network

The Independence Fund

The Enlisted Association

United States Army Warrant Officers Association

Vets First/United Spinal Association

Veterans of Foreign Wars

Vietnam Veterans of America

Wounded Warrior Project