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,

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