



May 18, 2020

Chairman Thom Tillis
Ranking Member Kirsten Gillibrand
Subcommittee on Personnel
Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Chairwoman Jackie Speier
Ranking Member Trent Kelly
Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Armed Services Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tillis, Ranking Member Gillibrand, Chairwoman Speier and Ranking Member Kelly:

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of organizations representing 5.5 million service members, veterans, their families and survivors, urges you to **include a provision in the FY21 NDAA to halt planned downsizing of military hospitals and clinics**. Military treatment facility (MTF) restructuring directed by the FY17 NDAA and medical billet cuts proposed in the FY21 DoD budget are based on outdated assessments of military medical end strength requirements. The COVID-19 pandemic demands medical readiness requirements be reassessed and updated with lessons learned from the whole of nation response to the coronavirus emergency.

The Defense Health Agency (DHA) has assured beneficiaries all plans to reduce MTF capacity have been paused, but that is not enough. Even before COVID-19, there were concerns about DHA's analysis and mitigation planning for beneficiary care moved out of MTFs due to medical billet reductions and MTF downsizing.

DHA has not yet completed reports to Congress required by the FY17 NDAA Sec. 703 and the FY20 NDAA Sec. 719. These reports are critical to ensure civilian providers can absorb any care eliminated from MTFs. The current circumstances dictate a pause to these efforts. The civilian medical system is in flux with surging demand for coronavirus-related testing and treatment, while patients defer most other non-essential medical care. Major medical systems are laying off workers while smaller practices struggle to remain viable. It will be impossible to assess civilian capacity to absorb military patients moved out of MTFs for the foreseeable future.

This national emergency should also trigger a re-evaluation of military medical readiness requirements. The civilian medical system has little incentive to maintain excess capacity and was unable to fully adjust to the demand surge from COVID-19 patients. The Department of Defense has played a key role in the interagency whole of government response, with thousands of uniformed medical personnel deployed to communities across the nation. MTF provider deployments during this national medical emergency have

shifted risk to military beneficiaries who rely on uniformed medical personnel for their care. While MHS Reform has focused on finding efficiencies, COVID-19 should prompt an analysis of the level of excess capacity required to prepare for the unexpected. Will proposed billet cuts leave the MHS too lean to fulfill the crisis response mission while also providing beneficiary care?

This crisis will yield many lessons for the entire medical system and, potentially, an updated vision for DoD's role in any future nationwide medical emergency. When this crisis has passed, DoD should not simply move ahead with reform designed around pre-COVID evaluations of the MHS. As the FY21 NDAA moves forward, we urge you to include a provision to halt the downsizing of military treatment facilities and the reduction of uniformed medical personnel until a full analysis of the COVID-19 response has been conducted and those lessons have been applied to military medical end strength requirements; civilian medical systems are stable enough for an accurate assessment of their capacities; and DHA has completed the reporting mandated by the FY17 and FY20 NDAs.

Sincerely,

The Military Coalition:

Air Force Association (AFA)
Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)
Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA)
AMSUS, the Society of Federal Health Professionals
Association of the United States Navy (AUSN)
Commissioned Officers Association of the US Public Health Service (COA)
Chief Warrant Officers Association of the US Coast Guard (CWOA)
Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)
Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)
Gold Star Wives of America (GSW)
Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV)
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)
National Military Family Association (NMFA)
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association (NERA)
Non Commissioned Officers Association (NCOA)
Reserve Organization of America (ROA)
TREA: The Enlisted Association (TREA)
United States Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA)
USCG Chief Petty Officers Association (CPOA)
Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
VetsFirst
Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)