



THE MILITARY COALITION

July 12, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Majority Leader and Mr. Minority Leader,

The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of uniformed services and veterans associations representing more than 5 million current and former service members and their families and survivors, writes to urge your leadership intercession to provide more substantive FY17 Defense Authorization Act relief for 63,000 military widows whose military sponsors' uniformed service caused their untimely deaths.

This group of survivors qualifies for two survivor benefits: (a) DoD's Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity (55% of SBP-covered retired pay) purchased by their military sponsor upon retirement from service or awarded in certain cases for death in currently serving status; and (b) VA's Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) annuity (currently \$1,254 monthly) payable for service-caused deaths. Current law requires deduction of DIC from SBP, which the 2007 Veterans Disability Benefits Commission and others acknowledged is unfair. SBP is member-purchased coverage to replace a share of service-earned retired pay; DIC is a separate and distinct federal indemnity compensation for a service-caused death.

Congress recognized the inequity and authorized the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) in 2007 as partial recompense for SBP-DIC survivors. The legislative history shows the intent was to continue increasing SSIA amounts, subject to funding, so as to phase out the SBP-DIC offset over time. The current SSIA rate is \$275 monthly, rising to \$310 for FY2017. Faced with the October 1, 2017 sunset of the SSIA authority, the House Armed Services Committee found offsets to extend the \$310 allowance for one year in its FY17 Defense Authorization Bill. The Senate Armed Services Committee funded a permanent extension at the same \$310 monthly rate in its bill by raising pharmacy copay requirements significantly for military TRICARE beneficiaries across the board.

We appreciate the HASC/SASC mandatory spending challenges, but believe SBP-DIC widows deserve more relief. We hope you will agree, at a minimum, Congress should continue toward phasing out the SBP-DIC offset via a multi-year schedule of SSIA increases. The Coalition believes funding this should be the responsibility of the government, rather than passing the bill to military beneficiaries through pharmacy copay increases or other benefit cuts. But HASC and SASC leaders need external help to do it.

Please exert your personal influence to find additional offsets so the Armed Services Committee conferees can authorize an SSIA increase without imposing the cost on military beneficiaries.

Last year, Congress found offsets to keep wealthy Medicare beneficiaries from paying an extra \$100-\$200 monthly in Part B premiums. Military widows who are losing \$15,000 a year deserve no less.

Sincerely,

The Military Coalition
(Signatures enclosed)

cc: Committee on Armed Services

Air Force Association
Air Force Sergeants Association
Air Force Women Officers Associated
Army Aviation Association of America
AMSUS, the Society of Federal Health Professionals
Association of the United States Army
Chief Warrant & Warrant Officers Association, USCG
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.
Fleet Reserve Association
Gold Star Wives
Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America
Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America
Marine Corps League
Marine Corps Reserve Association
Military Officers Association of America
Military Order of the Purple Heart
National Association for Uniformed Services
National Military Family Association
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association
Non Commissioned Officers Association
The Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America
The Retired 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

Military Coalition Letter in re: July 12, 2016



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The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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