

September 26th, 2017

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
218 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2208 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2264 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators McCain and Reed and Representatives Thornberry and Smith:

The National Military and Veterans Alliance, a non-partisan group of military and veteran service organizations, writes to ask that, as the leaders of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act conference committee, you continue to support section 638 but that you reject existing language in sections 701, 706 and 707 of Senate Bill 1519.

Our member organizations greatly appreciate the inclusion of section 638, language that would permanently extend the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance. We have long fought collectively to urge a total repeal of the Survivor Benefit Plan-Disability Indemnification Compensation offset for our surviving spouses—arguably the most egregious and unfair theft of military-related benefits in black-letter law. While we would prefer a total repeal of the offset, permanently extending the SSIA benefit will clearly provide much needed financial relief for military widows. However, funding for this extension must not come at the expense of increased costs for other earned benefits.

Section 701 seeks to institute a “TRICARE Advantage” demonstration program. The NMVA appreciates attempts by congress to “improve the experience of care while reducing government spending in both the Medicare and TRICARE programs.” However, as we have become accustomed to seeing, attempts by Congress to reduce costs to the government usually result in increased costs and/or reductions in the earned benefits of veterans, retirees, and their family members. We see no reason to expect this cost-saving measure to be any different. Prior to making any changes to the TRICARE for Life program we would like to be assured that no diminishment of the current TFL benefit will result. Specific questions include:

- Will Medicare Advantage reduce TRICARE-covered services to be more in line with Medicare-covered services?
- TRICARE does not limit hospital stays to 180 days whereas Medicare does. With Advantage, if more hospital days are required, will TRICARE pay over 180 days with the beneficiary paying the copay or only supplement the Medicare days?
- Medicare limits rehabilitation, TRICARE does not. If more days are medically necessary, will TRICARE pay?

Until we can be assured that any changes to the current TFL program will not negatively impact military retirees and their families, our member organizations will not support such initiatives and we urge you to reject them.

Section 706 seeks to increase the cost-sharing amounts for the TRICARE pharmacy benefit for Fiscal Years 2018-2026. NMVA supports improving care for beneficiaries of the military health system. However, increased TRICARE pharmacy co-pays will create financial burdens for military retirees, especially in areas with large military retiree populations that live too far from military treatment facilities to take advantage of the lower cost prescriptions that they offer. Instead, these retirees and their families will be compelled to use the TRICARE mail order system or retail pharmacies and in both cases, they would have higher copays.

Section 707 seeks to undo the hard-fought results of veteran service organization advocacy efforts that prevent TRICARE cost increases from affecting current retirees or those currently serving and/or who join the military prior to January, 2018. If allowed into the final bill, upon retirement, all current service members will become subject to pending fee increases. Likewise, those who are currently retired will be immediately subject to them.

NMVA believes that increasing out-of-pocket TRICARE expenses at this stage would represent a rather transparent attempt to create savings in the DoD budget on the backs of retirees and those currently serving. This would amount to a broken promise to those who have already earned those benefits, which was rightly rejected by the 2017 NDAA. We strenuously urge you to leave in place the existing language that was agreed to in conference and subsequently signed into law by the President last year.

On behalf of our nation's military retirees and their surviving spouses, both present and future, we thank you for your attention to these aspects of the 2018 NDAA. We eagerly await the reconciled bill and are confident that your influence, paired with your desire to maintain the integrity of the Senate in the eyes of those who have dedicated twenty or more years of their lives to military service, can result in the funding of all of the benefits our retirees and surviving spouses have earned.

Sincerely,



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National Military and Veterans Alliance Member Organizations Supporting this Letter

American Logistics Association
American Military Retirees Association
American Military Society
American Retirees Association
Army Navy Union
Association of the United States Navy
Military Order of Foreign Wars
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Military Order of the World Wars
Society of Military Widows
Square Deal for Veterans
The Flag & General Officers Network
The Retired Enlisted Association
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
Vietnam Veterans of America