

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 22, 2019

VADM Raquel C. Bono, MC, USN
Director, Defense Health Agency
7700 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 5101
Falls Church, VA 22042-5101

Thomas McCaffery
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs
Department of Defense

Dear VADM Bono and Mr. McCaffery:

We write out of concern about the proposed elimination of over 17,000 military medical personnel and the impact of this dramatic reduction on servicemembers and their families. We have been told that military commands have been instructed to plan for these billets to disappear on October 1, 2019, and we would like to understand the serious medical and mission implications for both active duty personnel and their beneficiaries. There also may be significant indirect effects, including cuts to and/or elimination of military health training programs, which serve as vital, culturally competent workforce development components.

We are concerned deep personnel cuts will degrade hard earned capabilities and result in a medical force too small to support both the operational plans and their requisite medical requirements. These cuts not only risk combat operations, but they also compromise our ability to effectively provide health care and humanitarian support for crises like the Haiti earthquake and Ebola outbreak. We fear a diminished medical force will mean more frequent and unpredictable deployments for medical personnel resulting in reduced overseas dwell ratios and negatively impacting retention in the critical medical skills area.

In particular, we are concerned about the elimination of military social workers, psychologists, and other mental health professional billets, given the key role these active duty clinicians play in providing mental health care to servicemembers and their families. As you know, many of these active duty psychologists and other clinicians operate in areas where it is difficult and often impossible to find civilian practitioners (especially in remote areas) and/or to find those with military cultural competence and expertise. Over and over, we have seen these very same issues arise when trying to fill TRICARE networks with competent mental health providers, and when trying to build Department of Veterans Affairs community care provider networks with those able to provide appropriate evidence-based and culturally competent mental health care.

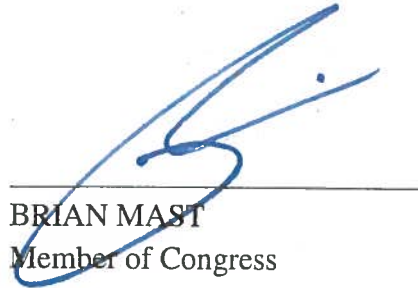
We would like to see the decision-making process used in proposing the elimination of the medical billets, especially those related to mental health care, and to understand how Department of Defense staff will continuously monitor and assess the impact of these decisions such that a real-time reassessment process is possible and different decisions proposed, if necessary.

We appreciate your commitment to service members, retirees, their families, and survivors. We look forward to your prompt response to this matter and appreciate your assistance.

Sincerely,



TULSI GABBARD
Member of Congress



BRIAN MAST
Member of Congress



TED DEUTCH
Member of Congress



GWEN MOORE
Member of Congress



LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD
Member of Congress



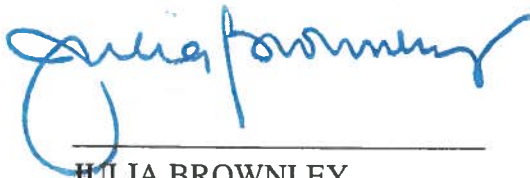
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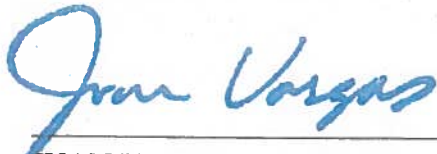
SALUD CARBAJAL
Member of Congress



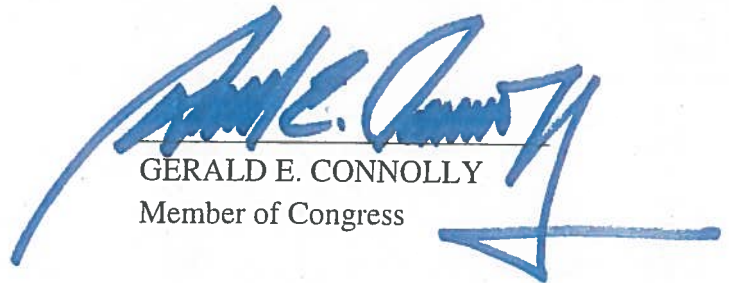
ELAINE G. LURIA
Member of Congress



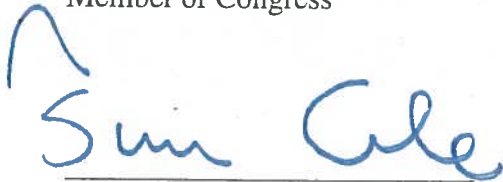
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JUAN VARGAS
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GERALD E. CONNOLLY
Member of Congress



TOM COLE
Member of Congress



DENNY HECK
Member of Congress



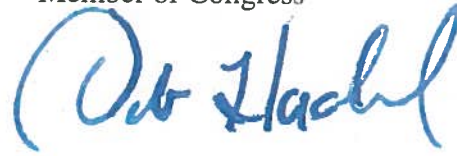
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TONY CARDENAS
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DEB HAALAND
Member of Congress