

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 28, 2022

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2310 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2310 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Reed, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Ranking Member Rogers:

Thank you for your strong leadership in support of military families, including authorizing a Basic Needs Allowance in the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act. As Congress negotiates the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, which is on track to significantly raise the topline for defense spending, we urge you to ensure military families are not left behind. Specifically, we encourage Committee leadership to include provisions in the final conference bill that would make critical improvements to the Basic Needs Allowance, in line with a request from Senators Duckworth and Blumenthal and Representative Panetta in a letter dated October 7, 2022. Given the House and SASC-passed bills raise the topline for defense spending by \$37 billion and \$45 billion respectively, it would be wrong to pass a final conference bill without provisions included by each chamber that would strengthen the Basic Needs Allowance and more effectively address military hunger.

As Members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, we believe it is critical that the final conference bill includes investments in service members and their families, including investments to ensure military families can put food on the table. Last year, we were proud to support the Basic Needs Allowance to more effectively combat food insecurity among military families. However, because the Basic Needs Allowance includes the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) as income for the purposes of determining eligibility, the program could leave large numbers of vulnerable families without the support they need. While Secretary Austin has the authority to exclude BAH in areas deemed “high cost of living,” the Department has not yet clarified how this standard will be determined. And as we know, food insecurity is not limited to bases in more expensive areas, as evident by the presence of food pantries in or near every major military installation in the United States.¹

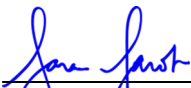
¹ Hungry in the Military: Food Insecurity Among Military Families in the U.S. MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. April 2021.

Provisions included in the House and SASC-passed bills would help ensure the Basic Needs Allowance can reach and benefit more military families experiencing hunger. Specifically, Section 601 of the House bill would remove the Basic Housing Allowance from income for the purposes of determining eligibility, expanding eligibility from approximately 500 to over 3,000 families according to CBO estimates.² Section 604 of the SASC-passed bill would further increase access to the Basic Needs Allowance, raising the eligibility threshold from 130% to 150% of the federal poverty line to more accurately capture food insecurity and bring the threshold in line with many states' thresholds for SNAP eligibility. Both the House and SASC provisions draw on lessons learned from the discontinued Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance (FSSA), addressing features that contributed to FSSA's limited reach and effectiveness.³

While some may believe investments in our service members and their families are not high priorities, these issues have far-reaching consequences affecting our readiness and national security. According to a Department of Defense report released in July 2022, nearly *one quarter* of active duty service members experienced some level of food insecurity in the prior year.⁴ Military hunger is not only a moral failing, but it also hurts force readiness, morale, recruitment, and retention, ultimately threatening our national security. As Congress raises the topline for defense spending, it is critical that these investments serve our military families, including by ensuring the Basic Needs Allowance can more fully address military hunger when it is implemented.

Thank you again for your leadership in support of military families and your consideration of this request. We look forward to continuing to work together to end military hunger.

Sincerely,



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

² Cost Estimate for H.R. 4350, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022. Congressional Budget Office. September 2021; Cost Estimate for S. 2792, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022. Congressional Budget Office. October 2021.

³ Final Report. Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission. January 2015.

⁴ Strengthening Food Security in the Force: Strategy and Roadmap. Office of the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, U.S. Department of Defense, July 2022.