

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 11, 2019

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Thornberry,

We write to thank you for your diligent work on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and bring your attention to the vital issue of blast exposure.

As co-chairs of the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force, we work to increase awareness of brain injury in the United States, support research and rehabilitation, and address the effects that these injuries have on families, children, and the workforce. As many as 320,000 of our troops—or nearly 20 percent of the soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan—are believed to have sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI) while serving in the line of duty.¹ The Institute of Medicine, now National Academy of Medicine, concluded that these service members are at increased risk of long-term health issues including depression, Alzheimer's-like symptoms, seizures, and problems with social functioning.

We were very pleased to see language we have supported included in the Subcommittee on Military Personnel markup of H.R. 2500, the NDAA FY20. Specifically, Title VII, Subtitle C, Sec. 7 includes language that will ensure blast exposure history will be recorded in medical records of servicemembers. The legislation now requires documentation of the date of exposure, the duration of exposure and measured blast pressures experienced by an individual during blast exposure, whether exposure occurred during combat or training, and such other information on exposure as the Secretary of Defense has specified in guidance.

The FY18 NDAA included an interim report on the study methods and action plan for the longitudinal medical study on Blast Exposure Pressure of Members of the Armed Forces.² This initial report, which was sent to House and Senate Armed Services Committees in April 2019, lays out lines of inquiry that the Section 734 Workgroup will explore, including assessing the “feasibility and advisability of inclusion of blast pressure exposure history in the serve and/or medical record” of servicemembers. Optimizing the readiness of servicemembers and recording blast exposure data is essential so that soldiers receive proper care for any service-connected medical issues that may arise later.

We are hopeful that the guidance to collect exposure information will reflect the best available technology, including blast sensors that are commercially available. We are also optimistic that the Secretary of

¹ McKee, A. C., & Robinson, M. E. (2014). Military-related traumatic brain injury and neurodegeneration. *Alzheimer's & dementia: the journal of the Alzheimer's Association*, 10(3 Suppl), S242–S253. doi:10.1016/j.jalz.2014.04.003

² U.S. Army Medical Command. (2019). *Initial report: Longitudinal medical study on blast pressure exposure of members of the armed forces, authorized by Section 734 of PL 115-91*. Retrieved from <https://www.health.mil/Reference-Center/Congressional-Testimonies/2019/04/11/Longitudinal-Medical-Study-on-Blast-Pressure-Exposure-of-Members-of-the-Armed-Forces>

Defense will consider the feasibility of utilizing the Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System—Industrial Hygiene (DOEHRS-IH), the system of record for Department of Defense (DoD) longitudinal exposures, as a mechanism for recording blast exposure data. We have attached language reflecting this modification.

We are encouraged by the language included in the NDAA FY20 bill and we are hopeful that the DoD will establish blast pressure protection requirements as the understanding of traumatic brain injury improves. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to working with you to further protect servicemembers via the FY20 NDAA.

Sincerely,



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Don Bacon
Member of Congress

**Amendment to H.R. 2500
National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020**

Offered by: Mr. Bacon of Nebraska

In the portion of the report to accompany H.R. 2500 titled "Report on Integration of Information regarding Environmental Health Hazards in Department of Defense Housing into Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System", strike the following text: "in Department of Defense Housing"

In the portion of the report to accompany H.R. 2500 titled "Report on Integration of Information regarding Environmental Health Hazards in Department of Defense Housing into Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System", insert at paragraph (1), in the parenthetical, the following new text: "and blast pressure exposure".

In the portion of the report to accompany H.R. 2500 titled "Report on Integration of Information regarding Environmental Health Hazards in Department of Defense Housing into Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System", insert at paragraph (3), in the parenthetical, the following new text: "and blast pressure exposure".

In the portion of the report to accompany H.R. 2500 titled "Report on Integration of Information regarding Environmental Health Hazards in Department of Defense Housing into Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System", insert after paragraph (5), the following new text: "(6) the feasibility and advisability of allowing personnel of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs to have access to DOEHRs or a similar system."