



ENLISTED ASSOCIATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES

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July 9, 2018

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Messrs. Chairmen and Ranking Members:

I write to you today on behalf of the members of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS) which represents the interests and concerns of well over one million members of the Army and Air National Guard, their family members, National Guard retirees, and survivors. Founded in 1972, EANGUS is dedicated to the principles of providing an adequate national defense and promoting the status, welfare, and professionalism of the men and women of the Army and Air National Guard by supporting legislation that provides adequate staffing, pay, benefits, entitlements, equipment, and installations for the National Guard.

As you convene conference to address Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act provisions, I would like to express concern regarding three provisions before the conference committee with the hope that members will vote to remove these provisions.

First, EANGUS members are concerned about Senate Section 701. In 2018, the Department of Defense's (DOD) Defense Health Agency raised out of pocket costs using a formula that penalizes judicious users and rewards frequent users of the military health system. In addition, the Agency admitted that the additional higher fees collected will not be used solely for maintaining or improving the military health system. Instead, these funds would be a source of revenue to the Department to fund other priorities. For several years, the Defense Health Program reprogrammed funds into readiness accounts, and then submitted out of pocket cost increases to beneficiaries claiming the high cost of health care. Please remove Senate Section 701 and do not raise fees on those that judiciously use the military health system.

Second, EANGUS members are concerned about House Section 701 that authorizes a two-year demonstration project for Medicare-eligible beneficiaries using TRICARE for Life (TFL). The demonstration project removes this group of beneficiaries from the TRICARE program and places them onto a commercial Medicare Advantage program initially paid for by DOD. We view this as a precursor to divesting all TFL beneficiaries from the TRICARE program at the end of the demonstration project, similar to moving U.S. Postal Service annuitants onto Medicare suggested by H.R. 756 and S. 2629. EANGUS members view this provision as a major break in faith and an erosion of promised benefits after a lifetime of service. The additional burden of paying for a Medicare Advantage plan will be financially devastating to retirees on a fixed income. We urge its removal.

Finally, EANGUS members are concerned about Senate Section 702 regarding the transition of Reserve Component Servicemembers to Federal Employees Dental/Vision Program (FEDVIP) for dental readiness. Senate Section 702 ensures Reserve Component Servicemembers would be responsible for one-hundred percent of premium costs, losing the subsidy in place for the current dental plan. At a time when the Army and Air National Guard are not meeting required end strength, shifting these costs from the Department to the Servicemember and their family members is ill advised. Keeping Reserve Component members in the TRICARE Dental Plan will maintain their readiness for operational missions.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring these troubling provisions to your attention. Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact Scott Bousum, Legislative Director, EANGUS at scott.bousum@eangus.org. Thank you and your staff for your continued support of our servicemembers, civilians, veterans, and military families.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Frank Yoakum", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

SGM Frank Yoakum, U.S. Army (Retired)
Executive Director

cc: Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee
Members of the House Armed Services Committee named to the Conference Committee