

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 20, 2023

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
Washington, DC 20510

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

As you work to reconcile the House- and Senate-passed versions of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), we strongly urge you to retain Section 601 of the House-passed NDAA for FY2024, which would ensure parental leave parity for certain members of the Reserve Components. This important provision expands parental leave eligibility for drilling members of the Reserve and National Guard so all parents can spend critical time with their new children.

Currently, an unintended disparity in eligibility for parental leave exists for certain service members that Section 601 of the House-passed NDAA aims to resolve. Section 602 of the FY2021 NDAA authorized the equivalent of twelve weeks of maternity leave for members of the Reserves and National Guard by allowing them to take leave during the three-monthly drill periods after the birth of their child. This provision describes how pay and retirement points accrue to new birth mothers in the Reserve Component who take this period of leave, in order to ensure that they have a qualifying year toward retirement and receive their normal monthly drill compensation.

The following year, Section 621 of the FY2022 NDAA expanded paid parental leave for members of the armed forces on active duty orders. This provision authorized service members on active duty orders to take up to twelve weeks of parental leave during the one-year period following: 1) the birth or adoption of a child of the member, and 2) the placement of a minor child with the member for adoption or long-term foster care.

We are pleased to note the past progress made by the Senate and House Armed Services Committees in ensuring our service members receive the parental leave they deserve. However, we must eliminate the disparity for members of the Reserve Component. The FY2021 NDAA provision covering drilling members of the Reserve Component was limited to birth mothers, leaving out fathers and parents adopting a child or accepting the placement of a child for long-term foster care. Additionally, the expansion of parental leave in the FY2022 NDAA did not

include certain members of the Reserve Component. Section 601 of the House-passed NDAA would fix this discrepancy by ensuring that, starting in Fiscal Year 2025, both parents bringing a new child into their home would be eligible to take parental leave from drill periods during those first three months in order to care for their new child.

At a time when we are seeing recruiting and retention challenges across the services, this simple fix helps to ensure that parents are fully supported as they build their families. Section 601 was included on a bipartisan basis in the House-passed NDAA and is backed by bipartisan support in the Senate. It closes a gap for Reserve and National Guard members and allows their parental leave benefits to apply to mothers as well as fathers bringing a new child into the home. We urge you to keep this Section intact in the final version of the FY2024 NDAA.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to our nation's service members, and we urge you to continue advocating for service members as they become new parents in the final FY2024 NDAA conference agreement.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Zach Nunn
United States Representative



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Jeff Jackson
United States Representative