

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 28, 2022

The Honorable Betty McCollum  
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Defense  
Capitol Building H-405  
Washington, DC, 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Defense  
Capitol Building H-405  
Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Calvert,

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2023 Defense Appropriations Bill, we urge you to include funding to train military direct care providers on eating disorders in order to screen, briefly intervene, and refer for treatment servicemembers and military families.

Servicemembers are affected by eating disorders at elevated and accelerating rates compared to civilians due to risk factors unique to their military experience.<sup>1</sup> The Defense Health Board released a 2020 report confirming that active-duty servicewomen are disproportionately impacted by eating disorders, affecting their health and readiness.<sup>2</sup> Diagnoses of eating disorders among military personnel rose 26% from 2013-2016,<sup>3</sup> and 16% of female veterans currently suffer an eating disorder.<sup>4</sup> Military spouses and children are also affected at higher rates than the general population; 21% of children of servicemembers and 26% of spouses of servicemembers are symptomatic for an eating disorder,<sup>5</sup> rates three times higher than their civilian peers.<sup>6</sup> According to the DoD, 19,468 servicemember dependents received an eating disorder diagnosis from FY 2014 through FY 2018.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the increasing prevalence of eating disorders amongst servicemembers, military health professionals are not adequately trained in screening, intervention, and referral for treatment of eating disorders. Nationally, only 20% provide elective coursework in eating disorders and only 6% of medical schools require training in eating disorders to graduate.<sup>8</sup>

Congress recognized the needs of servicemembers and military families with eating disorders when they passed language based off the bipartisan SERVE Act within the FY22 NDAA that authorized the Defense Secretary to build infrastructure to identify, treat, and rehabilitate servicemembers and treat military families affected by eating disorders. Therefore, we urge you to include the following language in the FY23 Defense Appropriations Bill:

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, B. and Mitchell, K., 2015. Eating disorders in military and veteran men and women: A systematic review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 48(8), pp.1057-1069.

<sup>2</sup> Defense Health Board. *Active-Duty Women's Health Care Services*. November 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, Valerie AU., Stahlman, Shauna AU., Taubman, Stephen. (2018). Diagnoses of eating disorders, active component service members, U.S. Armed Forces, 2013-2017. VL-25.

<sup>4</sup> Slane, J., Levine, M., Borrero, S., Mattocks, K., Ozier, A., Silliker, N., Bathulapalli, H., Brandt, C. and Haskell, S., 2016. Eating Behaviors: Prevalence, Psychiatric Comorbidity, and Associations With Body Mass Index Among Male and Female Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans. *Military Medicine*, 181(11), pp.e1650-e1656.

<sup>5</sup> Waasdorp, C. E., Caboot, J. B., Robinson, C. A., Abraham, A. A., & Adelman, W. P. (2007). Screening Military Dependent Adolescent Females for Disordered Eating. *Military Medicine*, 172(9), 962-967. doi:10.7205/milmed.172.9.962

<sup>6</sup> Higgins Neyland MK, Shank LM, Burke NL, et al. Parental deployment and distress, and adolescent disordered eating in prevention-seeking military dependents. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2019;1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.231806>.

<sup>7</sup> Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch, *Diagnoses of Eating Disorders, Active Component Service Members, U.S. Armed Forces, 2013-2017, Medical Surveillance Monthly Report*, (Silver Spring, MD: June 2018), p. 18

<sup>8</sup> Mahr, Fauzia, Farahmand, Pantea, Bixler, Edward O., et. al (2014). A national survey of eating disorder training

*The Committee understands that servicemembers, particularly active-duty servicewomen, and their families are disproportionately affected by the serious mental illness of eating disorders, threatening their health and combat readiness. Eating disorders have the second highest mortality rate of any psychiatric illness, second only to opioid use, however, only 6% of medical schools require trainings on eating disorders. Section 702 of the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act authorizes the Secretary of Defense to implement procedures to identify, treat, and rehabilitate servicemembers affected by eating disorders. The Committee recommendation includes \$5,000,000 for the Secretary of Defense to furnish to medical professionals who provide direct care services under the military health systems, a training, consistent with generally accepted standards of care, on how to screen, briefly intervene, and refer to treatment servicemembers and families experiencing eating disorders. The Committee directs the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to the congressional defense committees not later than 180 days after the enactment of this act, in conjunction with the Secretary of Health and Human Services and Secretary of Veterans Affairs, on the current practices by the Department of Defense regarding the trainings of direct care providers using generally accepted standards of care and screenings of servicemembers.*

By training military health professionals to recognize and treat eating disorders, we can strengthen the health and readiness of our armed forces and save lives. We urge you to include this request in the upcoming package.

Sincerely,



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Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



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John Katko  
Member of Congress



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Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress



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Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



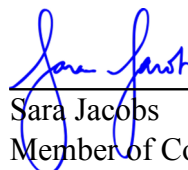
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Andrew R. Garbarino  
Member of Congress



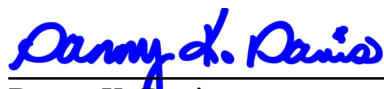
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David B. McKinley P.E.  
Member of Congress



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Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress



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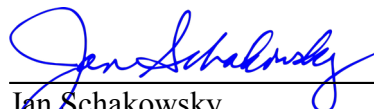
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Scott H. Peters  
Member of Congress




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Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress




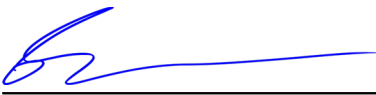
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Member of Congress

  
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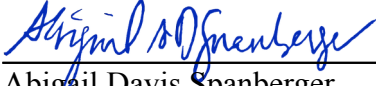
  
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