

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 24, 2024

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
Defense Subcommittee
House Committee on Appropriations
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
Defense Subcommittee
House Committee on Appropriations
2426 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum:

As you begin to prepare the Defense Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), we respectfully request strong support for funds to address food insecurity among our military personnel and their families. For the past four years, the United States Congress has advocated for new and increased measures to assist our personnel facing food insecurity in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). In October 2022, the Senate and House Appropriations Committees expressed concern over reports indicating the prevalence of military families facing hunger grew from one in eight families prior to 2020, to one in five since. While Congress established the Basic Needs Allowance in the FY22 NDAA, and lifted the Federal Poverty Limit to qualify for BNA from 130% to 150% in the FY23 NDAA, increased measures are needed to ensure that our service members and their families that are facing hunger have access to nutritious meals.

Food insecurity among servicemembers and their families has been a longstanding concern for the United States Armed Forces. In response, Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to report on food insecurity among Members of the Armed Forces and their dependents in the FY20 NDAA. In July 2022, the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness released new analysis¹ suggesting that previous assessments of food insecurity among the Armed Forces may have underestimated the scale of military hunger. Rather than the 0.1% of the force previously identified as food insecure, the updated analysis showed that 24% of all active-duty servicemembers, or approximately 286,800 personnel, experienced food insecurity in 2020 and 2021. More recently, the Office of the Secretary of Defense asked the RAND Corporation to produce its February 2023 report entitled, "Food Insecurity in the U.S. Military." RAND's findings indicated that 25.8% of personnel in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard were food insecure.² Of that, nearly 70% were mid-career enlisted personnel in grades E-4 to E-6, while the remaining majority were in grades E-1 to E-3.

Released findings from the Defense Department's 2021 biennial Survey of Active Duty Spouses, published in February 2022, articulated the issue for military spouses. The report found that

¹ Strengthening Food Security in the Force: Strategy and Roadmap, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Department of Defense. July 2022.

² "Food Insecurity in the U.S. Military," The RAND Corporation, February 03, 2023, Pg 2

31% of junior enlisted spouses are food insecure, and almost half comprise E1- E4 ranks.³ While prior years have witnessed concern about the quality of data collected regarding food insecurity, recent reporting, including from RAND, clarifies the extent of insecurity to the point where Congress can no longer question the prevalence of military hunger.

We respectfully request your partnership as we continue efforts to support around 287,000 servicemembers struggling to put food on their dinner tables. With a 2024 proposed defense budget of \$841.4 billion, providing the capacity to purchase adequate nutritious meals for our military personnel and their families, especially ones with dependents, should not only be feasible, but a top priority. We owe it to our troops to take care of their basic needs.

Sincerely,



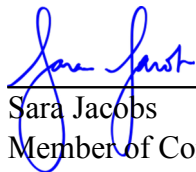
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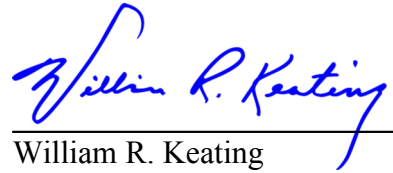


Mike Levin
Member of Congress

³ "2021 Food Insecurity Among Active Duty Spouses," Department of Defense, February 10, 2023.
<https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Infographic/2021-adss-food-insecurity.pdf>



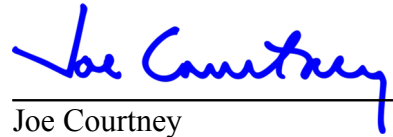
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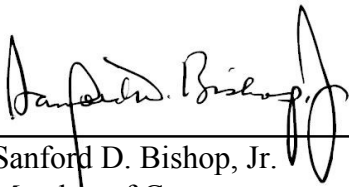
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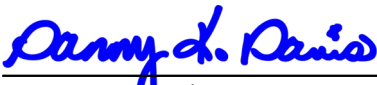
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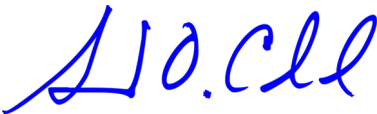
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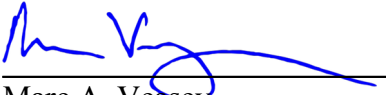
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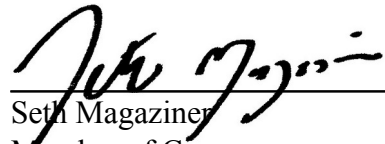
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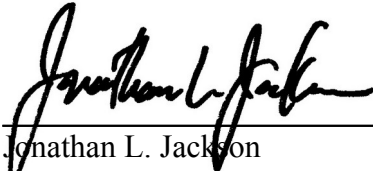
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