

October 10, 2024

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

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

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

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

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

We are national Military and Veteran Service Organizations who are committed to enhancing the quality of life of service members and their families. One of our main priorities is ensuring that the health care available to military families through the TRICARE benefit is on par with the offerings of top civilian plans. For that reason, we strongly support Section 705 of S. 4638 and Section 701 of H.R. 8070, which would expand coverage of reproductive health care to active duty service members and their spouses. We urge you to ensure that this coverage is included in the final version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

Our nation's military families earn their health care benefit through immense service and sacrifice. The coverage offered under that plan should be consistent with what is available through top commercial plans. That requires TRICARE policies to evolve to address new technologies, treatment protocols, and commercial plan benchmarks. However, coverage of reproductive health care falls short of that standard. Currently assisted reproductive technology (ART) is covered in very limited circumstances, for service members with service-connected infertility. In contrast, starting in 2025, the Federal Employee Health Benefit (FEHB) Program will offer expanded fertility benefits. In fact, according to OPM, every FEHB enrollee will have a choice of multiple nationwide plans that offer comprehensive coverage of in vitro fertilization (IVF).¹ Similar coverage plans will be available to Members of Congress and their staff. TRICARE must meet the same standards – our service members and their families deserve no less.

The health care benefit is an earned benefit and an essential part of military compensation. Coverage should not be contingent on a service member's willingness or ability to accept an additional service commitment. For that reason, we caution Congress against adopting Section 627 of S. 4638, which would require a service member benefiting from expanded reproductive health coverage to accept an additional service commitment of four years. Again, military members deserve coverage that is on par with civilian plans, and civilian plans make no such demands of their beneficiaries.

¹ <https://www.opm.gov/news/releases/2024/09/2024-open-season-ivf-fact-sheet/#:~:text=For%202025%2C%20the%20Federal%20Employees,that%20offer%20comprehensive%20IVF%20coverage.>

We appreciate that Congress has recognized the challenges that many service members face in building their families and are grateful for the inclusion of provisions expanding ART coverage in both the House and Senate versions of the NDAA. However, we are concerned that both provisions specifically exclude retirees from this expanded coverage. It is important to note that many military retirees are in their late thirties or early forties and may have deferred starting a family due to the demands of their military career. In addition, the military health benefit should be consistent and uniform across all categories of beneficiaries. We ask Congress to expand coverage of reproductive health care to the entire beneficiary population as soon as possible.

Ensuring that service members have access to essential health care to build their families is vital to retaining the skilled force we need to defend our nation. Thank you for your efforts to extend this important benefit to military families.

Sincerely,

Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)

AMVETS

Chief Warrant Officers Association of the U.S. Coast Guard (CWOA)

Elizabeth Dole Foundation

Gold Star Wives of America

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)

National Enlisted Reserve Association (NERA)

National Military Family Association (NMFA)

Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)

The Independence Fund

United States Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA)

U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association and Enlisted Association