

August 30, 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 nonprofit organizations that have partnered to raise awareness of and combat food insecurity among military families. As you work to finalize the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025, we ask that you prioritize provisions recommended by the bipartisan House Quality of Life panel that address military family financial well-being. Doing so will help ensure that every military family can afford to put healthy food on the table.

It is difficult to accept that anyone serving our country in the military might struggle with food insecurity, but the evidence is clear. Data from Department of Defense (DoD) surveys of active duty service members and military spouses reveal that up to 25% have experienced food insecurity¹, defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”² In its surveys, DoD measured food insecurity by using questions developed by USDA, which asked respondents to assess whether they had ever worried that their food would be gone before they could afford to buy more, or whether they could sometimes not afford to eat balanced meals.

We appreciate that in recent years, both Congress and the Administration have recognized the pervasiveness of military family food insecurity and taken steps to address it. We are especially grateful to Congress for directing DoD to implement a Basic Needs Allowance (BNA), a temporary pay boost for service members whose incomes and household size place them below 150% of federal poverty guidelines. However, despite these efforts, military families continue to struggle financially. As one Navy spouse told us, “There have been times where days after getting paid we only had a few hundred dollars for the rest of the month.”

The provisions recommended by the House Quality of Life panel will put military families on a solid financial footing and give them the security that they can afford to feed their families. In order to fully resolve the issue of food insecurity, we urge Congress to adopt the following provisions included in H.R. 8070, *the Servicemember Quality of Life and National Defense Authorization Act*:

¹ <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Infographic/2021-adss-food-insecurity.pdf>

² <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/measurement/#insecurity>

- **Section 1801, Reform of rates of monthly basic pay.** While military compensation is generally competitive with civilian pay, the salaries for junior enlisted service members have not kept pace. Increasing pay rates for junior enlisted in ranks E-1 to E-4 by 15% will bridge that gap and help ensure the financial stability of the most junior service members. Doing so will also boost recruitment and retention, as prospective service members will enter the force secure in the knowledge that they can support their families while pursuing a military career.
- **Section 1802, Basic Allowance for Housing; authorization of appropriations.** Currently, BAH only covers 95% of a service member's housing expenses; military families pay out of pocket to cover the rest. This gap has placed a strain on military family finances, especially as BAH has not kept pace with skyrocketing housing costs. No military family should have to choose between buying groceries or paying rent. Appropriating funds to cover 100% of BAH will lessen the burden on families and reduce the risk of food insecurity.
- **Section 1804, Basic Needs Allowance for members on active service in the Armed Forces; expansion of eligibility; increase of amount.** Increasing BNA eligibility to those within 200% of the federal poverty guidelines would provide much needed assistance to the most financially vulnerable military families who are currently falling just above the eligibility threshold.

Supporting military families' health, well-being and quality of life is essential to ensuring we have the ready force we need to secure the safety of our nation. Thank you for all you do to support America's military families.

Sincerely,

The National Military Family Association

Military Officers' Association of America

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger