

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 14, 2009

The Honorable Carl Levin  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John McCain  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Levin and Ranking Member McCain:

Thank you for your leadership on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2010. We write to ask your continued support for Section 711 of the NDAA as we enter conference committee. Section 711 provides for important improvements for assessments provided for service members before and after they deploy to combat. The House version currently lacks this important provision.

Your committee unanimously accepted Section 711 during its markup of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010. This provision is a modified version of the Post-Deployment Health Assessment Act of 2009 (S. 711), which is supported by a bipartisan coalition of Senators, as well as the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the National Guard Association, the Enlisted Association of the National Guard, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Congress needs to take action to address the shortfalls in the military's system of identifying and caring for post-traumatic stress injuries. According to a 2008 RAND study, nearly 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or major depression. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are more than 35 percent more likely to commit suicide than the general population.

The Department of Defense cannot address this wave of post-traumatic stress injuries until it has an effective system for diagnosing these hidden wounds. The Institute of Medicine concluded in 2006 that the best determination of whether a person is suffering from PTSD is with "a thorough, face-to-face interview by a health professional trained in diagnosing psychiatric disorders."

Section 711 requires all service members to receive multiple person-to-person mental health assessments before and after they deploy to combat. This screening program has proven effective in a Montana National Guard pilot program.

When Section 711 of the Senate version is discussed in conference committee, we ask that you support efforts to preserve the Senate language on this issue. We look forward to your continued leadership on the Senate's priorities when the bill is negotiated in conference committee.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus

Jon Tester

Chuck Grassley

Phil Johnson

Jim Johnson

Frank R. Lautenberg

Byron D. Dorgan

Al Franken

Chris Schu

Amy Klobuchar

Jim Aubin

Robert A. Niekirk

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