



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0916

June 14, 2023

Representative Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith,

As the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) begins its consideration of the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I write to request the inclusion of two provisions that will help ensure the mental and physical health of our service members stationed at home and abroad.

Both of these important proposals, which I have also introduced as standalone bills, passed the U.S. House with unanimous support as part of last year's NDAA.

The first measure the Safe Disposal for Servicemembers Act (H.R. 129), has the bipartisan support of Reps. Kuster and Gimenez, and requires the Department of Defense (DoD) to ensure there is an accessible drop box on each military installation for members of the Armed Forces and their families to deposit unused prescription drugs.

As you know all too well, we are seeing a very tragic increase in the number of active-duty overdoses in recent years. According to a DoD report, Fort Bragg lost 31 soldiers in five years due to overdoses, the highest number of any installation. Additionally, the same DoD report found that over 15,000 service members overdosed on illicit drugs from 2017-2021. Of those, 322 cases were fatal. We **must** do a better job protecting our nation's service members from dangerous drugs while they are on base.

The second provision, introduced as H.R. 2482, the Treating Invisible Wounds On Base Act, has the bipartisan support of Reps. Bobby Scott, Kiggans, Pettersen, Bacon and Neguse. This important legislation requires the DoD to study and report to Congress on the accessibility of mental health care providers and services for members of the Armed Forces serving on active duty.

Unfortunately, military service often takes an immense psychological toll on our service members and far too many are dying by suicide as a result. According to the DoD Suicide Report, 328 active-duty service members committed suicide in 2021. A 2021 Brown University study also found that 30,177 active-duty personnel and veterans who served in the military post-9/11 have died by suicide – compared to the 7,052 service members killed in combat in those same 20 years.

In a February 2023 report by the Suicide Prevention & Response Independent Review Committee (SPIRC), there are 117 recommendations that they believe DoD should implement to improve the health and well-being of service members. One of the recommendations SPIRC made in the “must implement” category was expediting the hiring process for behavioral health professionals. It is clear that access to mental health providers is a serious issue for our nation’s service members, and completing a study of their availability will allow the DoD to better focus resources to address this critical issue.

Both of these commonsense and bipartisan proposals will not only ensure that our service members have access to critical services when they need them the most but improve the readiness of our Armed Forces as a result. Thank you for your steadfast support of our brave men and women in uniform and I look forward to working with you and the rest of your committee to advance the NDAA for the 63rd year in a row.

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress