

July 26, 2017

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Reed:

As members of One Voice Against Cancer (OVAC), a broad coalition of nearly 50 cancer related organizations that focus on the federal investment in cancer research, we urge you to support the bipartisan Durbin-Blunt amendment to S. 1519, the fiscal year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This important amendment ensures critical cancer research continues at the Department of Defense (DoD).

Specifically, the amendment protects cancer research by negating Sections 733, 891, 892, and 893 of the bill. These provisions will effectively eliminate innovative cancer research funded by the DoD by limiting the scope of funding and imposing onerous procurement requirements and unnecessary regulations on grant applicants, mostly academic research institutions.

Section 733 specifies that the DoD cannot fund research unless it "is designed to directly protect, enhance, or restore the health and safety of members of the Armed Forces". While this provision seems innocuous, we believe that if enacted, the life-enhancing cancer research within the Congressionally-Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) would be at risk. Cancer can strike men, women, and children of any age, race, or socioeconomic level, including military service members and their dependents. The DoD strategic cancer research must continue for the health of our armed forces and their families. This provision puts research at risk by allowing Administration officials, rather than elected Members of Congress, to make decisions regarding funding of critical programs.

We also support the amendment's nullification of Sections 891, 892 and 893, provisions that will make it nearly impossible for academic research institutions to apply for the grant funding from the DoD. The burden and expense of compliance associated with the requirements in these sections are designed to vet companies and contractors entrusted with sensitive military information – not academic researchers pursuing biomedical advances.

Further, the Armed Services Committee and military leadership are currently working to streamline and alleviate unnecessary burdens in the DoD's acquisition process. These provisions run counter to those goals and serve to further hinder the Department with additional requirements that lengthen the grant-making process without providing additional benefit to the integrity of the process. We should allow research institutions to utilize their time and funding to work towards curing cancers, not working through paperwork and red tape.

The CDMRP's two-tiered grant review process is unique to the Federal Government, utilizing military program managers and patient advocates in addition to traditional peer-reviewers. This approach ensures that the DoD does not unnecessarily duplicate research funded by other institutions and, instead, aggressively complements that research by targeting critical gaps in science. The DoD's strategic approach has produced results and is helping win the fight against cancer.

On behalf of the millions of patients, survivors and their families who are fighting cancer, the members of OVAC urge you to vote on and support the bipartisan Durbin-Blunt amendment to ensure cancer research funding continues at the DoD. Congress should continue to support the innovative accomplishments of CDMRP-funded research and allow it to continue to discover new breakthroughs for our servicemen and women, military families, and veterans.

Sincerely,