

May XX, 2020

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senate  
506 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jackie Speier  
United States House of Representatives  
2465 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Shaheen and Congresswoman Speier:

As organizations committed to protecting and improving access to reproductive health care, we write in support of the Access to Contraception for Servicemembers and Dependents Act of 2019 and any effort to include the legislation in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021. This bill would ensure that all servicemembers and their dependents who rely on the military for health care have improved access to comprehensive contraceptive coverage and family planning care. During the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis, increasing access to essential care such as contraception has become ever more urgent and necessary. Therefore, we call on Congress to pass the commonsense provisions in your legislation.

Birth control is basic preventive health care. For military servicemembers and their families, it is also critical to ensuring military readiness. Women play an essential role in the U.S. military, currently making up close to 17% of all active duty and 20% of reserve members of the Armed Forces, and the vast majority are of reproductive age.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, nearly half of all beneficiaries that rely on the Department of Defense's (DOD) TRICARE health care program are women.<sup>2</sup>

Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), group and individual plans must cover all FDA-approved female-controlled birth control methods and any related education or counseling without cost-sharing. However, the ACA does not extend to TRICARE, and non-active duty servicemembers and military family dependents covered by TRICARE must still pay co-pays depending on their TRICARE plan, beneficiary category, preferred contraceptive method and how they obtain their prescription. Your bill would remove cost-sharing for birth control obtained through the mail-order pharmacy, the TRICARE retail pharmacy program or at a military facility, bringing TRICARE's birth control coverage policies in line with other employer-based insurance plans. With this provision, people eligible for DOD-based health insurance will have the same birth control coverage as civilian federal employees and those who rely on private insurance coverage. In

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense: *2018 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community*. <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2018-demographics-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Defense: *Evaluation of the TRICARE Program: Fiscal Year 2019 Report to Congress* (February 28, 2018).

particular, enabling coverage without co-pays through mail-order pharmacies can increase access to essential birth control care while at the same time reducing in-person interactions with health care providers during this ongoing public health crisis.

In addition to removing the disparity between civilian and DOD-based health insurance, your bill would improve servicemembers' access to emergency contraception (EC) by codifying existing Department of Defense regulations that all clinicians, including those that don't specialize in women's health, at MTFs provide survivors of sexual assault with information regarding EC and offer EC upon a survivor's request.

Finally, this bill would enhance family planning education for all servicemembers. Survey data, including the Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Active Duty Military Personnel, show a need for comprehensive evidence-based contraceptive education among servicemembers.<sup>3</sup> This bill would create a standardized educational program across all branches of the military to ensure that all servicemembers receive the same, high quality information.

Women have served in every U.S. military conflict since the American Revolution, and more than 345,000 women have fought in our current wars.<sup>4</sup> Your legislation would help ensure that they receive the high-quality health care they deserve, including expanding access during the devastating global pandemic. Thank you again for your outstanding leadership and support for women's health.

Sincerely,

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<sup>3</sup> RAND National Defense Research Institute: *2015 Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS)* (2018) <https://www.health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Access-Cost-Quality-and-Safety/Health-Care-Program-Evaluation/Survey-of-Health-Related-Behaviors/2015-Health-Related-Behavior-Survey-Active-Duty>

<sup>4</sup> Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America: *2019 Member Survey*. <https://iava.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/IAVA-2019-Member-Survey.pdf>