

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 14, 2016

The Honorable John McCain
Senate Armed Services Committee
218 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
House Armed Services Committee
2208 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Senate Armed Services Committee
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
House Armed Services Committee
2264 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen McCain and Thornberry and Ranking Members Reed and Smith:

As you begin conference on the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), we write to express our strong, bipartisan support for removal of the damaging changes proposed to Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) in Section 604 of the Senate bill, S. 2943. The consequences of the Senate proposals are negative and ill-considered.

Specifically, the changes outlined in S.2943 would cause significant financial hardship to many military families and unfairly penalize dual-service military couples as well as single service members who cohabitate in order to make financial ends meet. This proposal is particularly adverse for many women serving our country honorably, who have earned their due compensation. Twenty percent of the women on active duty are in dual-military marriages, compared with only 3.8% of active duty men. The proposed language also fails to account for the cohabitation of service members of different ranks. As drafted, the amount provided for BAH would simply be divided by the number of uniformed personnel sharing the same housing—not defaulting to the higher BAH eligibility. For example, an O-3 married to, or living with, an O-2 would only be eligible for the average of their individual BAH rates—further penalizing personnel.

The occupancy proposal is also a disincentive for single service members to obtain uniformed roommates, undermining an important source of community, security, and support. Effectively, we would be encouraging single service members—most often our junior personnel—to seek out civilian strangers as roommates instead of fellow uniformed personnel in order to retain their full housing allowance. Further, the administrative and programmatic requirements to implement these new restrictions would likely bring about costly, new administrative burdens to the military services, negating the cost savings these punitive policies are designed to yield. Adequate research, planning, and understanding is required before such sweeping changes can be responsibly advanced.

The talented men and women of our Armed Forces are called upon daily to perform vital missions around the world. In every one of those mission areas, our service members are the key to success. Taking care of these individuals has to be our first priority. We believe more thorough and thoughtful consideration is required before any such reforms are arbitrarily adopted. We simply cannot stand behind provisions that directly penalize dual-military families, women, and our most junior members and respectfully request that you eliminate Section 604 of S. 2943.

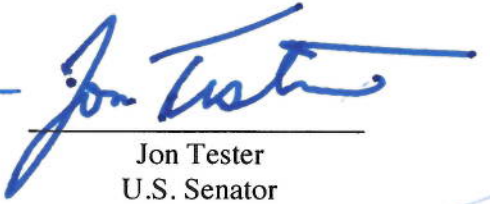
Sincerely,



John Boozman
U.S. Senator



Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senator



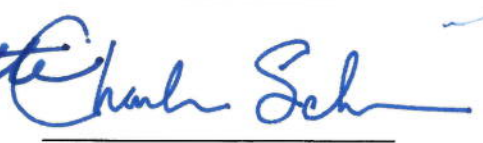
Jon Tester
U.S. Senator



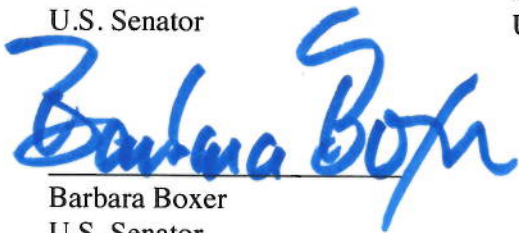
Richard Burr
U.S. Senator



Kelly A. Ayotte
U.S. Senator



Charles E. Schumer
U.S. Senator



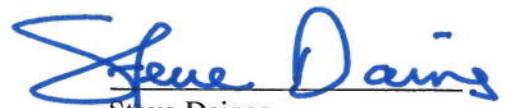
Barbara Boxer
U.S. Senator



Johnny Isakson
U.S. Senator



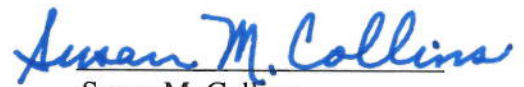
Barbara A. Mikulski
U.S. Senator



Steve Daines
U.S. Senator



Cory Gardner
U.S. Senator



Susan M. Collins
U.S. Senator



Mark R. Warner
U.S. Senator



Robert Menendez
U.S. Senator



Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator



Dan Sullivan
U.S. Senator



Jerry Moran
U.S. Senator



John Hoeven
U.S. Senator