

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 13, 2016

The Honorable John McCain  
Chairman  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
728 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Reed:

We write regarding the conference committee for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (NDAA). As passed by the Senate, this legislation contains provisions that strengthen defense policy and fortify our national security. As conference negotiations begin, we urge you to ensure that Section 536 concerning Boards for the Correction of Military Records (BCMRs) and Discharge Review Boards (DRBs) of the Senate-passed NDAA is included in the final version of the NDAA. This section provides much-needed updates to the current process of military records corrections to ensure that veterans receive the full honors and benefits they deserve for their service.

Over the past decade, the United States Armed Forces have greatly improved their expertise and practices regarding post-traumatic stress (PTS) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). However, the Armed Forces have not always understood how the mental health disorders related to combat or military sexual trauma can lead to the behavior that results in discharges for misconduct. Despite honorable service to our country, servicemembers have in some cases received less than honorable discharges from military service stemming from combat-related or military sexual trauma-related mental health disorders. Section 536 of the Senate-passed NDAA ensures these veterans have a chance to dispute their discharge with the proper consideration of mental health professionals sitting on their review board. In addition, it requires both BCMRs and DRBs to make records available online to help veterans prepare for records review boards proceedings.

While we continue to learn more about the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of PTS and TBI, it is critical that we continue to take care of veterans already living with these conditions. As Section 536 of the Senate-passed FY 2017 NDAA improves the options for some of these veterans, we urge you to ensure it remains in the NDAA. We thank you for your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you on this matter.

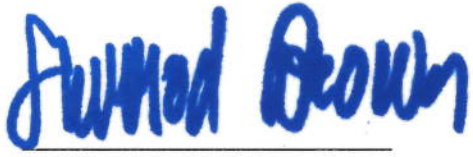
Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



GARY C. PETERS  
United States Senate



SHERROD BROWN  
United States Senate



KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND  
United States Senate

cc: Chairman Mac Thornberry, House Armed Services Committee  
Ranking Member Adam Smith, House Armed Services Committee