

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

March 29, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Secretary Austin,

We deeply appreciate your leadership at the Department of Defense (Department) in acknowledging and working to address the issue of food insecurity in the military, and we are grateful to the Biden Administration for its strong support of the inclusion of a basic needs allowance (BNA) for low-income servicemembers in the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (P.L.117-81).

As Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Armed Services we share your desire to address food insecurity for servicemembers and look forward to working together on this issue. To that end, as the Department works to implement the basic needs allowance, we ask that you consider the below recommendations, which we believe would make the BNA as effective as possible in combatting food and financial insecurity for low-income servicemembers:

- **Ensure the basic needs allowance is an “opt-out” benefit.** The NDAA states that servicemembers are eligible for the BNA if they “[do] not elect . . . *not* to receive the allowance” and specifies that servicemembers must elect in writing *not* to receive the allowance. We strongly encourage the Department comply with these requirements by establishing the BNA as an “opt-out” benefit, automatically enrolling all who are eligible, based on the Department’s screening, and allowing them to submit applications for the allowance after enrollment or decline the allowance in writing if they do not wish to receive it.
- **Utilize Basic Housing Allowance exclusion authority to the greatest extent possible.** The NDAA specifies that the Secretary may exclude any portion of the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) from consideration as income for purposes of determining eligibility for the BNA for servicemembers located in an area with a high cost of living. We encourage you to utilize this authority to the greatest extent possible and to exempt as much of the BAH as possible for as many servicemembers as possible.
- **Certify eligibility for the allowance annually.** Excluding situations in which servicemembers receive a promotion that results in a raise or any other permanent increase to pay or allowances that exceeds 130 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines, we encourage the Department to certify eligibility for the BNA annually. Recertifying more frequently will create unnecessary administrative burdens for both the Department and servicemembers.

Thank you again for your work to address food and financial insecurity among servicemembers. We look forward to working with the Department to ensure that no one who serves our country has to worry about putting food on their table. We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



David Scott
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture



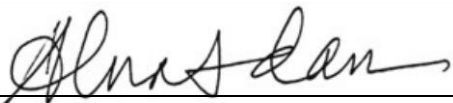
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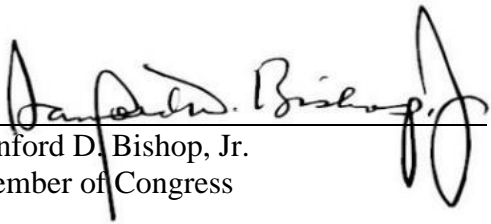


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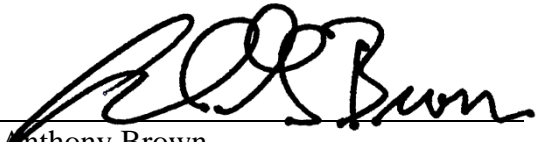


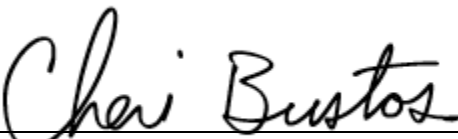
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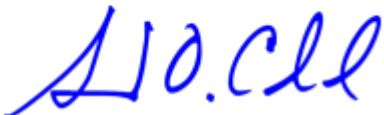

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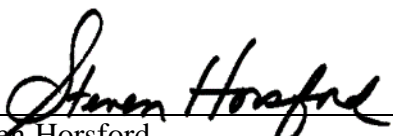

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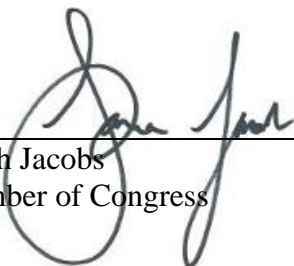

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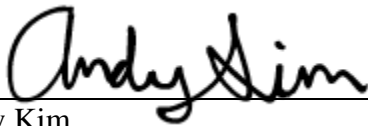

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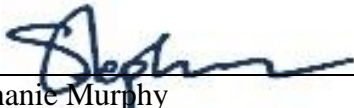
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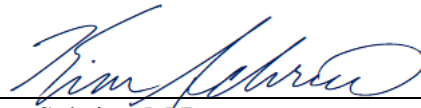
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