

November 2, 2022

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

On behalf of the more than 162,000 members of the American Dental Association (ADA), we write to ask that you restore the two star rank or higher for the chief dental officers of the Army and Air Force, and that you upgrade the rank of the Chief Dental Officer of the Navy to the two stars in the fiscal year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Good oral health is essential to military readiness and the general health of service members, and maintaining the historic rank of chief dental officers will ensure that oral health is not treated as a secondary concern.

The statutory rank of Major General for the chief dentist of the Army was long-standing, having been established by Public Law 95-485 in 1978. Later, in 2006, Congress required that the chief dentist of the Air Force have the rank of Major General in Public Law 109-363. Congress made this change to Title 10 out of a recognition that not only should there be parity of grade for the chief dental officers of the Army and Air Force, but also because of the importance of oral health for medical readiness and timely deployment of the members of the armed forces. The Department of the Navy has also previously recognized the importance of oral health for military readiness by supporting changes to Title 10, Section 5138 that would have achieved rank parity for the Navy Dental Corps Chief (at the rank of Rear Admiral, Upper Half or O-8). However, following proposals to limit chief dental officers to one star ranks, the 2017 NDAA eliminated the statutory rank requirements for chief dental officer. No chief dental officer currently has a two star rank. Restoring historic ranks for the chief dental officer of the Army and Air Force and achieving parity for the Navy would not present a significant cost, since there is only one General or Flag Officer in the Dental Corps of the Army, Air Force, and Navy. The difference in cost would be limited to the difference in compensation for a one-star and a two-star office.

Dental readiness in the military is a critically important issue for overall medical readiness. The ADA believes that a diminution of dentistry's position with the respective surgeon generals' offices may prevent dental readiness from being maintained and improved. Failure to maintain

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the ranks of the chief dental officers risks many of the gains the services have recently made towards the overall dental health levels necessary to support national defense.

The ADA is also concerned that not restoring chief dental officers' ranks will have a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of military dental officers. Military dentists may view a lower rank for chief dental officers as a sign that the military is not emphasizing oral health, and that it does not recognize the contribution of military dentists to national defense.

Finally, Congress should be aware that the rank of the Chief Dentist of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) is tied to the rank of the Chief Dentist of the Army by Title 42, Section 207. The ADA also supports a 2 star rank for the Chief Dental Office of the USPHS.

The ADA is committed to working towards better oral health for members of our military, and for all Americans. We ask that you restore the two star rank or higher for the chief dental officers of the Army and Air Force and offer parity for the chief dental officer of the Navy.

If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Fisher at fisherj@ada.org or at 202-789-5160.

Sincerely,

George R. Shepley, D.D.S.
President

Raymond A. Cohlma, D.D.S.
Executive Director

GRS:RAC:jf