

June 23, 2015

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

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
228 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry  
Chairman  
House Armed Services Committee  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

On behalf of the undersigned professional nursing and dental organizations, we write to express our opposition to Section 502 of the Senate version of the *National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2016*, which would lower the rank of certain military Chief Nurse Officers (CNOs) and Chief Dental Officers (CDOs).

Specifically, the rank of the CNOs for the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force Nurse Corps would be reduced from Major General to Brigadier General. Similarly, the rank of the CDOs serving with the U.S. Army and Air Force Dental Corps would also be reduced from Major General to Brigadier General. The Department of Defense's proposal to reduce the ranks of these CNOs and CDOs would yield minimal savings while adversely affecting the critical roles of these longstanding positions.

The advisory and leadership roles played by CNOs within the Army, Navy, and Air Force Nurse Corps, as well as the military healthcare system, would be undermined by a reduction in rank. As a significant segment of military health professionals, the Nurse Corps is vital to ensuring high quality care for our nation's service members, veterans, and their families. Decreasing the rank of these CNOs would weaken the visibility of their leadership and limit their ability to effectively compete for higher command responsibilities within the military health system. Moreover, this decrease in recognition and rank could be detrimental to the promotion, recruitment, and retention of individuals committed to serving in the Nurse Corps.

Similarly, the dental profession must be appropriately represented within the Army and Air Force Dental Corps to ensure that high quality dental health is delivered. Just as with the CNO position, the CDO provides unique advisory and leadership to the respective service's health care systems which would be undermined by the proposed reduction in rank. Difficulties recruiting dental professionals within the military would only be exacerbated by a reduction in rank of the CDOs from a two-star to a one-star. Oral health is a critical component of military readiness and continued recognition of this role acknowledges the

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importance of the dental profession in national defense. Likewise, we are very concerned that this will deter dental officers from serving in the Dental Corps.

It is imperative that the Chief Nursing Officers of the Army, Navy, and Air Force Nurse Corps and the Chief Dental Officers of the Army and Air Force Dental Corps are recognized with equal rank alongside the Chief Officers of other health professions within the Corps. We believe that the unintended consequences of this provision will impact quality of care and the military's ability to retain these critical health professions. Therefore, on behalf of the nursing and dental professions, we request that section 502 of the Senate legislation be struck from the conference report and that current law be maintained in the *National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2016*.

Sincerely,

American Dental Association  
Academy of General Dentistry  
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology  
American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry  
American Academy of Periodontology  
American College of Prosthodontists  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons  
American Association of Women Dentists  
American Society of Dentist Anesthesiologists  
Hispanic Dental Association  
Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association