

June 11, 2019

The Honorable Adam Smith
United States House of Representatives
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Smith:

As organizations committed to protecting and improving reproductive health and rights, we write in support of the amendments offered by Representative Speier to the FY20 National Defense Authorization Act that would ensure that non-active duty servicemembers and military dependents have access to copay-free birth control, ensure access to emergency contraception for survivors of sexual assault, and improve family planning education for servicemembers. These amendments would ensure that all servicemembers and their dependents who rely on the military for health care have improved access to comprehensive contraceptive coverage and family planning care.

Birth control is basic preventive health care. For military servicemembers and their families, it is also critical to ensuring military readiness. Women play an essential role in the U.S. military, currently making up more than 17 percent of all active duty and reserve members of the Armed Forces, and half of all beneficiaries on the Department of Defense's (DOD) TRICARE health care program.^{1,2} According to DOD estimates, the vast majority (95%) of all women serving are of reproductive age, yet some report insufficient access to contraceptive services.

Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) group and individual plans must cover all FDA-approved birth control methods for women and any related education or counseling without cost-sharing. However, the ACA does not extend to TRICARE, and non-active duty servicemembers and military family dependents covered by TRICARE must still pay co-pays depending on their TRICARE plan, beneficiary category, preferred contraceptive method, and how they obtain their prescription. This amendment to remove cost-sharing for birth control obtained through the mail-order pharmacy, the TRICARE retail pharmacy program or at a military facility would bring TRICARE's birth control coverage policies in line with other employer-based insurance plans. With this provision, people eligible for TRICARE health insurance will have the same birth control coverage as civilian federal employees and those who rely on private insurance coverage.

¹ U.S. Department of Defense: *2017 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community*.
<http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2017-demographics-report.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Defense: *Evaluation of the TRICARE Program: Fiscal Year 2018 Report to Congress* (February 28, 2018).

We also write in support of the amendment to ensure servicemembers' access to emergency contraception (EC) by codifying existing Department of Defense regulations that health care providers at MTFs provide survivors of sexual assault with information regarding emergency contraception and offer EC upon a survivor's request.

Finally, we support Congresswoman Speier's amendment to enhance family planning education for all servicemembers. Survey data, including the Department of Defense Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Active Duty Military Personnel, show a need for comprehensive contraceptive education among servicemembers.³ This amendment would create a standardized educational program across all branches of the military to ensure that all servicemembers receive the same, high quality information.

Women have served in every U.S. military conflict since the American Revolution, and more than 345,000 women have fought in our current wars.⁴ This legislation would help ensure that they receive the high quality health care they deserve. Please continue to support our servicemembers by supporting the Speier amendments to ensure improved access to comprehensive contraceptive coverage and family planning care.

Thank you again for your support for women's health.

Sincerely,

³ RAND National Defense Research Institute: *2015 Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS)* (2018) <https://www.health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Access-Cost-Quality-and-Safety/Health-Care-Program-Evaluation/Survey-of-Health-Related-Behaviors/2015-Health-Related-Behavior-Survey-Active-Duty>

⁴ Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America: *2019 Member Survey*. <https://iava.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/IAVA-2019-Member-Survey.pdf>