

REPUBLICANS

MIKE BOST, ILLINOIS, CHAIRMAN
 AUMUA AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN, AMERICAN SAMOA
 JACK BERGMAN, MICHIGAN
 NANCY MACE, SOUTH CAROLINA
 MATTHEW M. ROSENDALE, MONTANA
 MARIANNETTE MILLER-MEEKS, IOWA
 GREGORY F. MURPHY, NORTH CAROLINA
 SCOTT FRANKLIN, FLORIDA
 DERICK VAN ORDEN, WISCONSIN
 MORGAN LUTTRELL, TEXAS
 JUAN CISCOMANI, ARIZONA
 ELI CRANE, ARIZONA
 KEITH SELF, TEXAS
 JEN KIGGANS, VIRGINIA

JON CLARK
 STAFF DIRECTOR

DEMOCRATS

MARK TAKANO, CALIFORNIA, RANKING MEMBER
 JULIA BROWNLEY, CALIFORNIA
 MIKE LEVIN, CALIFORNIA
 CHRIS PAPPAS, NEW HAMPSHIRE
 FRANK J. MRVAN, INDIANA
 SHEILA CHERFILUS-MCCORMICK, FLORIDA
 CHRIS DELUZIO, PENNSYLVANIA
 MORGAN MCGARVEY, KENTUCKY
 DELIA RAMIREZ, ILLINOIS
 GREG LANDSMAN, OHIO
 NIKKI BUDZINSKI, ILLINOIS

MATT REEL
 DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

364 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

April 4, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
 Secretary
 U.S. Department of Defense
 1000 Defense Pentagon
 Washington, DC 20302

Dear Secretary Austin:

Over the last few months, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, has been working diligently to introduce a package of bills to enhance and improve the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to ensure that our servicemembers have access to the best possible TAP experience to set them up for success as veterans. I invited staff from the Department of Defense to testify at our legislative hearing on this topic to discuss how we could improve the legislation, but unfortunately, your staff declined to participate. This is disappointing as TAP is an integral part of a servicemember's transition from being a productive member of the military to a productive member of American society. As you know, during the period of transition, servicemembers and their families often experience multiple, big life changes, which can bring about various challenges and unanticipated mental health distress as a result. We owe our servicemembers access to the resources that fit their unique needs as they conclude their time in service to our nation.

However, I have multiple reports of servicemembers being unable to get to TAP one year prior to their date of separation as required by law. According to a recent GAO study¹, only 25% of servicemembers attend TAP on time. This low percentage directly correlates to the Department of Defense's lack of accountability and lack of commitment to doing their part for the TAP program.

While I understand the importance of mission readiness as a 26-year Navy veteran myself, I believe that every commander should be held accountable in writing as part of their evaluation for promotions, just as they are held responsible for other mission readiness metrics. It

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2019). Servicemembers Transitioning to Civilian Life: DOD Could Enhance the Transition Assistance Program by Better Leveraging Performance Information.

is disheartening to see the Department of Defense continue to display a lack of accountability toward such an important issue. I expected to hear testimony from your Department at our recent hearing, or at the very least, receive timely technical assistance without persistent follow-ups to ensure that our legislation delivers on the promise we have made to our service men and women. I urge the Department of Defense to take this issue seriously as it has a direct correlation with retention, recruitment, and the future of our all-volunteer fighting force.

I hope you will take this important matter seriously and accept the invitation to testify in the future on this issue. The Department of Defense must move past these difficulties and execute the TAP program transparently and responsibly. All transitioning servicemembers, who will eventually become veterans, have earned access to all the services necessary to support their employment and transition needs. It is our duty to honor their service and provide them with the best possible support so that they can serve their communities in a new capacity. I believe a servicemember who is happy with their TAP experience will be one of the best recruiting tools the Department will ever have.

I am personally inviting you to testify in front of our committee to demonstrate to all the men and women of the US military that you are taking this issue very seriously and that you are dedicated to ensuring our heroic Americans are being supported during these troubling times.

Please provide a written response by close of business by April 18, 2024, that outlines your decision-making for why the Department failed to testify about Congress's comprehensive TAP improvement legislation, H.R. 7732. Please contact my staff if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,



DERRICK VAN ORDEN

Chairman

Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

Cc: The Honorable Mike Levin, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity,
The Honorable Jim Banks, Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel
The Honorable Andy Kim, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Military Personnel