

April 4, 2019

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jackie Speier
United States House of Representatives
2465 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Shaheen and Congresswoman Speier:

As organizations committed to protecting and improving women's health and rights, we write in support of the Access to Contraception for Servicemembers and Dependents Act of 2019. This bill 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.ⁱⁱⁱ 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 female-controlled birth control methods 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. Your bill would remove cost-sharing for birth control obtained through the mail-order pharmacy, the TRICARE retail pharmacy program or at a military facility, bringing TRICARE's birth control coverage policies in line with other employer-based insurance plans. With this provision, people eligible for DOD-based health insurance will have the same birth control coverage as civilian federal employees and those who rely on private insurance coverage.

In addition to removing the disparity between civilian and DOD-based health insurance, your bill would improve 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, this bill would 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.ⁱⁱⁱ This bill 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.^{iv} Your legislation would help ensure that they receive the high quality health care they deserve. Thank you again for your outstanding leadership and support for women's health.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Catholics for Choice
Center for Reproductive Rights
Guttmacher Institute
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
MomsRising
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Council of Jewish Women
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Health Law Program
National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH)
National Network of Abortion Funds
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Health Network
National Women's Law Center
Not Without Black Women
People For the American Way
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Population Connection Action Fund
Power to Decide
Service Women's Action Network
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

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

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

ⁱⁱⁱ 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>

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