

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 6, 2018

The Honorable Mac Thornberry  
Chairman  
Armed Services Committee  
2216 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
Armed Services Committee  
2216 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support the Health of our Special Operators in the FY19 National Defense Authorization Act

Dear Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith,

As co-chairs of the Congressional Special Operations Forces Caucus, thank you for the opportunity to highlight an important provision we would like to see included in the FY 2019 (FY19) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

As we are faced with an increased need for rapid response to emerging threats that often require unconventional warfare, we have relied heavily on our special operators to be an essential part of our national security strategy. This special force has become an agile and effective global force for good. They carry out diverse and complicated missions that are central to the defense of the nation, including unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, special reconnaissance, direct action, counter-terrorism and much more. As we know, their missions are often secret, so our neighbors likely will never know the extent of the bravery of our Special Operations Forces. Because of the tremendous sacrifices made by these quiet professionals to protect our homeland, we must be vigilant in our support to protect their health and wellbeing.

As we have seen over the years, the Department of Defense has teamed with medical researchers to help develop innovative ways to treat and cure diseases that impact the military community. It is our understanding that the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) is working with the Oncology Research Information Exchange Network (ORIEN) to track the health status of special operators with the goals of enhancing readiness and the overall health of servicemembers. The ORIEN consortium includes the John P. Murtha Cancer Center at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, which we have been told is serving as the coordinating center for this partnership.

The ORIEN consortium includes 17 academic medical centers that are united behind the idea that collaboration and access to data are the keys to cancer discovery. These member organizations have established a standard system to track patient molecular, clinical and epidemiological data and follow these cancer patients throughout their lifetime, with patient consent. The long-term surveillance of these patients will allow for lifetime consent, access to

clinical outcomes data and genomic sequencing of tumors. We understand that as of January 2018, nearly 200,000 patients have enrolled into this protocol, which will help find the cures and treatments of tomorrow. This type of protocol not only will help our special operators receive personalized cancer treatments to allow them to more quickly recover and return to duty, it could also help provide a framework for SOCOM to address other unique medical needs of our warfighters.

We are respectfully requesting that the report language below be included in the FY19 NDAA to show support for this partnership for the betterment of our special operators. It is our understanding that House Armed Services Committee members Reps. Stephanie Murphy, Matt Gaetz, Austin Scott and Mo Brooks have submitted this request as well.

“The Committee commends the efforts of the United States Special Operations Command to develop an information system to track the health status of Special Operations Forces personnel with the goal of proactively identifying, studying and mitigating risk. This effort is a cooperative endeavor involving the John P. Murtha Cancer Center of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs), and the Oncology Research Information Exchange Network -- a network of major academic centers (that includes the Murtha Center) which has developed a uniform protocol for long-term patient surveillance. The Committee encourages the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) to continue to assist the United States Special Operations Command in adapting this protocol for use in addressing risk and improving the overall health of military populations.”

Thank you for your strong continuing support for the health care needs of our warfighters and for your consideration of this language to continue that mission.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress



Scott Peters  
Member of Congress



Walter B. Jones  
Member of Congress



Tim Walz  
Member of Congress