

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

Washington, DC 20515-1303  
April 6, 2018

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 Chairman Thornberry and Ranking Member Smith,

As you begin to develop the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2019, I write to respectfully request that you include language expanding access to commissaries and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) facilities to additional categories of veterans. Specifically, the language I propose would extend this access to Purple Heart recipients, all disabled veterans with a service-connected disability, Medal of Honor recipients, former prisoners of war, and veteran caregivers.

America's brave veterans and their families deserve our utmost gratitude. It is our duty as a nation to not only to say that we appreciate their service but also to enact policies demonstrating that gratitude. Currently, only Active Duty, Retirees, and veterans with 100 percent disability rating—and in certain situations Reservist, National Guard, and DoD Civilian employees—are allowed to use the Defense Commissaries and Exchange stores. We should all agree that Purple Heart recipients, Medal of Honor recipients, former POWs and disabled veterans have done more than enough to also earn that access.

This simple action would make the lives of many veterans and their families a little easier at home. For these reasons the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and Paralyzed Veterans of America have endorsed this language.

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the draft language for the Committee to consider as it develops the NDAA text. Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing this request. Should you have any questions, please contact Christopher Baylor ([Christopher.baylor@mail.house.gov](mailto:Christopher.baylor@mail.house.gov)) or Sofya Leonova ([sofya.leonova@mail.house.gov](mailto:sofya.leonova@mail.house.gov)) on my staff.

Sincerely,



Daniel W. Lipinski  
Member of Congress

**Requested bill language regarding commissary and MWR facility access for certain veterans**

**National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2019**

**Submitted by Rep. Daniel W. Lipinski**

**SEC. \_\_\_\_\_. SHORT TITLE.**

This Act may be cited as the “Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans Equal Access Act of 2018”.

**SEC. \_\_\_\_\_. FINDINGS.**

Congress finds the following:

(1) In 2017, the Secretary of Defense determined that the addition of new patron categories to the commissary and exchange systems would support the growth of a robust customer base and help ensure the ability of both systems to provide benefits to members of the Armed Forces and their families.

(2) The Secretary previously opposed extending commissary and exchange privileges to large patron groups such as disabled veterans.

(3) In January 2017, the Secretary of Defense approved limited online exchange shopping privileges for all veterans, effective November 11, 2017.

(4) The Secretary determined that current patrons of exchanges did not perceive the extension of such privileges as diluting the benefit for members of the Armed Forces.

(5) The Purple Heart is the oldest military decoration, awarded to members of the Armed Forces who have been wounded or died in combat, fighting for the United States. Since the modern incarnation of the award was established in 1932, approximately 1,800,000 million members of the Armed Forces have been awarded the Purple Heart.

**SEC. \_\_\_\_\_. COMMISSARY STORES AND MWR FACILITIES PRIVILEGES FOR CERTAIN VETERANS AND VETERAN CAREGIVERS.**

(a) EXTENSION OF PRIVILEGES.—Chapter 54 of title 10, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

**“§ 1065. Use of commissary stores and MWR facilities: certain veterans and caregivers for veterans**

“(a) ELIGIBILITY OF VETERANS AWARDED THE PURPLE HEART.—A veteran who was awarded the Purple Heart shall be permitted to use commissary stores and MWR facilities on the same basis as a member of the armed forces entitled to retired or retainer pay.

“(b) ELIGIBILITY OF VETERANS WHO ARE MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS.—A veteran who is a Medal of Honor recipient shall be permitted to use commissary stores and MWR facilities on the same basis as a member of the armed forces entitled to retired or retainer pay.

“(c) ELIGIBILITY OF VETERANS WHO ARE FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR.—A veteran who is a former prisoner of war shall be permitted to use commissary stores and MWR facilities on the same basis as a member of the armed forces entitled to retired or retainer pay.

“(d) ELIGIBILITY OF VETERANS WITH SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITIES.—A veteran with a service-connected disability shall be permitted to use

commissary stores and MWR facilities on the same basis as a member of the armed forces entitled to retired or retainer pay.

“(e) ELIGIBILITY OF CAREGIVERS FOR VETERANS.—A caregiver or family caregiver shall be permitted to use commissary stores and MWR facilities on the same basis as a member of the armed forces entitled to retired or retainer pay.

“(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

“(1) The term ‘MWR facilities’ includes—

“(A) MWR retail facilities, as that term is defined in section 1063(e) of this title; and

“(B) military lodging operated by the Department of Defense for the morale, welfare, and recreation of members of the armed forces.

“(2) The term ‘Medal of Honor recipient’ has the meaning given that term in section 1074h(c) of this title.

“(3) The terms ‘veteran’, ‘former prisoner of war’, and ‘service-connected’ have the meanings given those terms in section 101 of title 38.

“(4) The terms ‘caregiver’ and ‘family caregiver’ have the meanings given those terms in section in section 1720G(d) of title 38.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 54 of title 10, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“1065. Use of commissary stores and MWR facilities: certain veterans and caregivers for veterans.”.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Section 1065 of title 10, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall take effect at the end of the 90-day period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act.

## **SEC. \_\_\_\_ . AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATION FOR UPDATING EPACS FOR MILITARY COMMISSARIES.**

There is hereby authorized to be appropriated, out of any funds in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, \$500,000 to the Secretary of Defense for the purpose of updating the electronic physical access control system used by military commissaries and exchanges so that the system may recognize and accept veteran health identification cards.

## **SEC. \_\_\_\_ . SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING INDIVIDUALS AWARDED THE PURPLE HEART.**

It is the sense of Congress that the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, should maintain a list of all individuals awarded the Purple Heart.