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Statement on the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act

Congressman Steve Cohen

May 3, 2021

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for important programs in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022. The NDAA is critical for our Armed Forces and our national defense.

An important focus of the NDAA should be providing support for the 1.4 million members of our Armed Forces, 18 million veterans and their families. They sacrifice so much and they deserve all the support necessary so that the men and women in uniform can focus on their role in the protection of our country.

I support a cost of living adjustment for the base military pay. With the *Wall Street Journal* reporting that CEOs of S&P 500 companies received an average 15% pay increase in 2020, it would be a travesty to not enact a meaningful cost of living adjustment for our men and women in uniform, who go over and beyond every day, and have been essential this year in aiding the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines.

Beyond financial support to our military families, we need to provide a strong health care system for them, ensuring that the Defense Health Program, known as TRICARE which provides health care to 9.6 million beneficiaries, is not short on resources. I urge the Committee to increase the medical care for the men and women who are serving in the military and those who have served, including those who have been exposed to toxic chemicals. It took over 40 years for Vietnam veterans to be able to receive military-connected care for bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinson's disease as a result of exposure to Agent Orange. There is no justifiable reason that it took so long for Congress to agree to cover these treatments. Going forward, we must be more proactive to ensure that the people who are serving in uniform or who have served receive the health care they need and deserve.

The Committee's support for health care for our military and veterans should include continued support for virtual health, or telehealth visits. When talking with doctors, nurses, active-duty military, or veterans, the message is clear: virtual health visits have been a tremendous tool throughout the pandemic and the Committee should continue support for virtual health visits through the Defense Health Program in perpetuity. Virtual health visits significantly reduce the time it takes to go to the doctor. By cutting out travel time, waiting periods and child care arrangements, appointments become much shorter. I encourage the Committee to continue support for wide use of virtual health visits so that our service members can quickly and easily check in with their care team.

I believe the Committee should consider ways cut overall defense spending. It is difficult for me to justify increasing our nation's defense spending when over 28 million Americans do not have health insurance and 34 million Americans are living in poverty. Our country needs a strong defense, but some programs are outdated or have seen tremendous overruns and have become boondoggles. I ask that the Committee look closely at these types of programs to determine if they should receive reauthorization.

One area of defense that should not be reduced is medical research. The pandemic and the medical community's rapid response to it has demonstrated how important basic and advanced medical research is to protecting our country and other citizens of the world. Without the groundwork on mRNA laid in the 1990s, modern researchers would not have been able to quickly create effective COVID-19 vaccines and administer nearly 250 million doses to Americans within 18 months of the first case of the disease. I urge the Committee to continue to support medical research that can lead to cross-cutting discoveries that help not only our military, but also our civilian population.

I strongly support the Research, Development, Test & Evaluation (RDT&E) program and ask for your continued support. Specifically, I would ask for an increase in funding of \$5 million for the Multiple Drone, Multiple Sensor Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Capabilities project. Led by the University of Memphis, in collaboration with the University of Arizona, the University of Central Florida, and IMEC USA, the Multiple Drone, Multiple Sensor ISR Capabilities project is focused on developing sensor integration on drones for battlefield situational awareness. The use of multiple drones with large area coverage electro-optical and infrared sensors for initial target detection coupled with multiple drones with interrogation sensors – such as acoustic, magnetic, electric field, vibrometry, and seismic – can discriminate

decoys from real targets and as well as detect real targets under camouflage. ISR is intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance that leads to effective targeting. This program builds on an FY21 initial investment and advances the technology further toward field deployment. In that particular investment, sensors on drones included infrared, visible, acoustic, and magnetic. This request extends the sensors to polarization, hyperspectral, and vibrometry. In the development of this research center capability, the University of Memphis leads a highly technical team to support Army wide area search operations with multi-drone execution as well as decoy and surrogate detection using additional drone sensor technology developed under this program.

Finally, I also request the Committee to consider a program increase of \$5M for the development of "Infrared Strap-Down Rotorcraft Pilotage Sensors." This program will develop sensor technology to replace the current expensive, heavy, complicated, and outdated Modified Pilot Night Vision Systems (MPNVS) with a lower weight, lower cost, more capable system. The new system will consist of multiple cameras strapped to the body of a rotorcraft. These cameras can cover 210 degrees in azimuth and 90 degrees in elevation simultaneously as opposed to MPNVS which requires the pilot to steer the sensor over this range of angle with his head. Because the sensors are always looking at the scene, they can collect more infrared energy from the scene and produce higher quality images resulting in improved performance in fog, dust, rain, snow, and smoke. In addition, total coverage of the forward hemisphere allows the sensors to perform multifunctional military tasks such as incoming missile detection as well as small arms fire detection. Total coverage on the front of the rotorcraft can even provide drone detection and ground target detection. This program will allow the development of an effective strap-down pilotage sensor. The University of Memphis will develop high fidelity simulations to evaluate sensor characteristics such as integration time. University of Memphis (UM), University of Arizona (UA), and University of Central Florida (UFC) in collaboration with PM Apache and the Army Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate will develop a sensor testbed to include low cost uncooled microbolometers, longwave and midwave photon imagers, as well as high gain reflective near infrared and shortwave infrared sensors to answer the require pilotage issues and develop an effective strap-down sensor strategy and the tools for sensor design.

Again, I appreciate Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, and the Committee for this opportunity to express my support for specific programs in the FY22 NDAA. Thank you for your consideration of these requests.