

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Smith, for the opportunity to testify before you here today.

Passing the National Defense Authorization Act each year is some of the most important work we do in Congress. This bill authorizes funding for the Department of Defense to enhance our national security and provide for our service members and their families. I'm honored to represent some of those service members and their families who are stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

Washington state has a very high cost of living, and that's especially true for our service members. They and their families already make so many sacrifices to serve their country, and it's only right that we ensure they're taken care of in turn. I was very proud to vote for the FY25 NDAA, which included a significant pay raise for junior enlisted members, expanded childcare fee assistance, and recognized the importance of our childcare workers on base. But there's so much more work to be done.

Housing and childcare continue to be particularly difficult expenses for many military families. Outside military bases like JBLM, raising the Basic Allowance on Housing, or BAH, only leads to landlords increasing their rents. While service members based out of Seattle were previously eligible for COLA, this was reversed in the most recent announcement of COLA-eligible locations for 2025. COLA gives service members more power than a simple BAH increase, and whether in Seattle or elsewhere in Washington, service members deserve fair compensation. Many of their civilian defense colleagues receive locality pay to address rising costs in the area, and this should be no different for our service members.

Service members in my district also desperately need more affordable and accessible childcare options. In Washington, pay for childcare workers on base is not on par with pay they can receive elsewhere, meaning childcare centers are not fully staffed and the need for child care is not being met. Increasing pay for childcare workers at military-operated childcare centers is a critical step to ensuring that these centers provide quality care for service members' families. This is particularly important for military spouses, who already face other challenges in maintaining their own careers.

We must also ensure states are equipped with comprehensive demographic information so they can fully understand the extent of childcare needs. Demographic and childcare fee assistance utilization data is currently only offered at the state level, which makes it impossible to understand if our current investments in childcare are effective. Each military installation in Washington state serves a unique community with unique childcare needs. Having this information at the zip code-level will allow states to identify whether adequate care is being provided, or if additional investments are necessary.

Lastly, I was extremely disappointed to see significant cuts to the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program in the full-year Continuing Resolution. CDMRP is a catalyst for groundbreaking innovations in healthcare, but the program was only funded at \$650 million in FY25. **That is a 57% cut compared to the \$1.5 billion funding level in FY24.** This resulted in more than 20 programs being cut, including research funding for various types of cancer, spinal cord injuries, HIV and AIDS, and epilepsy. And of the programs not cut, many received lower levels of funding. Research in the United States impacts people across the globe, and threatening it weakens us as a nation.

I look forward to working with the Committee to advance these priorities and more through the FY26 NDAA. Thank you for your time.