The Defense Health Research Consortium

May 8, 2018

Senator Richard Shelby Chairman Subcommittee on Defense Committee on Appropriations 122 Senate Dirksen Building Washington, DC 20510 Senator Richard Durbin Ranking Member Subcommittee on Defense Committee on Appropriations 113 Senate Dirksen Building Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Durbin:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) Defense Appropriations bill, we write to request your continued support for the critical and highly successful defense health research programs funded through the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP) at the Department of Defense (DoD). We deeply appreciate your support in a challenging fiscal environment for these programs during the FY18 budget process. As in previous years, you both exhibited extraordinary leadership in ensuring continuity in funding and operations for defense health research programs.

The highly innovative research portfolio supported by the CDMRP fuels scientific discovery by funding high impact research not sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other federal agencies. Many of the programs' award mechanisms propel the exploration of revolutionary ideas and concepts. Programs focus on the potential of having a significant impact upon both their respective fields of research and support and treatment for members of the military. Defense health research programs are worthy of continued federal support for the following reasons:

• Directly relevant to DoD-prevalent conditions: The medical research programs at DoD directly impact the health and lives of the U.S. military, their families, veterans and the public. Programs provide groundbreaking research on psychological health, Gulf War Illness, spinal cord injury, and hearing and vision loss (which comprise a significant portion of current battlefield injuries). Research also focuses on existing and emerging infectious diseases that may threaten operational readiness and health security, and why diseases like ALS and multiple sclerosis occur at greater rates in those who have served in the military. The DoD's defense health research program has also funded the orthopedic research program that has resulted in new limb-sparing techniques to save injured extremities and preserve and restore the functions of injured extremities.

Equally important, this disease-specific approach includes important medical research programs related to several forms of cancer (breast, blood, colorectal, kidney, melanoma, pancreatic, brain tumors, lung, ovarian, prostate, stomach, liver and cancers related to radiation exposure) and other disorders (like neurofibromatosis and tuberous sclerosis complex) that have led to breakthroughs on nerve regeneration, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

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- Complementary and not duplicative of other federal research: Defense health research program grants neither duplicate nor supplant NIH or VA research efforts, but rather enhance those efforts. They fund highly innovative projects support that is typically unavailable through other federal programs. For example, programmatically-related VA research funding is only available to VA employees (at least 0.625 full-time equivalent). CDMRP funds the best-qualified proposals from researchers and research teams at top research universities and medical centers. The NIH and DoD medical research portfolios have symbiotic relationships, allowing NIH-funded basic research to serve as a foundation for ground-breaking, disorder-targeted research at DoD. NIH and DoD program officers meet regularly to ensure collaboration and prevent duplication.
- Cutting-edge and focused on cures: While the NIH funds high-quality basic biomedical research, the defense health research programs provide essential emphasis on and support for finding innovative cures or new therapies for medical conditions. For several disorders, DoD breakthroughs have led to new clinical trials, new drug products, and novel procedures that are making a difference in the everyday lives of affected patients and families. For example, research funded by DoD led to the development of the only treatment for tuberous sclerosis complex approved by Food and Drug Administration. The ALS Research Program is supporting translational research and has developed four potential treatments for the disease, for which an effective treatment currently does not exist. Enclosed is a detailed white paper providing many examples of breakthroughs that have benefitted active duty warfighters, veterans, military families and civilian populations.
- Agile, adaptable, and collaborative: Each of the separate programs is guided by a specific vision and mission statement, which in addition to incorporating Congressional direction, reflect rapid change in knowledge, address research gaps, and prevent duplication. Annual funding prevents out-year budget commitments, which in turn further enhances programmatic flexibility. Many DoD programs identify, develop and fund collaborative and consortium-based research, helping to bring unique, interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, collaborative efforts to bear on complex medical research issues unlikely to be solved though the inherent limits of individual researchers.
- Competitive and unique peer review process: While Congress allocates funding through the annual Defense Appropriations Act to specific medical conditions, it does not direct the programs' dollars to specific researchers. These programs utilize an efficient multitiered process that includes multiple stages of peer review, including two levels of formal peer review of final proposals. Proposals are scored in a number of key areas such as scientific merit and impact for patients and the military, providing a robust comparative basis for helping accomplish the program's mission of finding and funding the best research related to these important medical conditions.

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- <u>Consumer review</u>: All defense health research programs incorporate the full and equal participation of consumer reviewers at every stage of the multi-tiered review process a novel and valuable practice in medical research funding. Consumers people actually affected by the disease or medical condition help ensure the program's funded research will have the greatest impact on those who are affected. Consumer reviewers also help inform and educate their disease advocacy communities and others.
- Generating economic growth across the United States: Research activities promote job growth and encourage long-term economic development through innovation. It has been estimated that for every dollar awarded in biomedical research grants, more than \$2 of additional business activity is created. Defense health research grants are awarded to universities and institutes in every state in the country.

In short, the well-executed and efficient programs within the defense health research programs demonstrate responsible government stewardship of taxpayer dollars and benefit current and former military service members, the general patient population, and our nation's economy.

Perhaps most importantly, DoD's innovative approaches to funding biomedical research have led to several significant breakthroughs and achievements, contributing to national security and the health and welfare of U.S. Armed Forces personnel and their dependents. Continued federal funding will only build on these successes.

Lastly, we are encouraged by and supportive of your efforts to restore "regular order" and proceed expeditiously with committee markups of the fiscal year 2019 Defense Appropriations Act. Continuing resolutions have had negative consequences for medical research, creating unnecessary instability and uncertainty in the grant solicitation, grant review, and grant making processes at DoD. Enactment of a fiscal year 2019 Defense Appropriations Act will allow DoD to most effectively convene programmatic panels to identify and implement programmatic changes, effectively convene peer-review panels to provide thorough review of grant applications, and conduct appropriate negotiations to ultimately award FY19 grants.

The undersigned respectfully request your support for FY 2019 funding of all programs within the defense health research programs.

Sincerely,

Adult Congenital Heart Association ALS Association American Academy of Dermatology Association American Academy of Neurology American Academy of Ophthalmology Letter to Chairman Shelby/Ranking Member Durbin

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American Association for Cancer Research

American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA)

American Brain Tumor Association

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American College of Rheumatology

American Diabetes Association

American Gastroenterological Association

American Liver Foundation

American Lung Association

American Psychological Association

American Thoracic Society

American Urological Association

Aplastic Anemia and MDS International Foundation

Arthritis Foundation

Association of American Cancer Institutes

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Autism Speaks

Beyond Celiac

Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network

Celiac Disease Foundation

Children's Tumor Foundation

Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation

Citizens United for Research in Epilepsy

Coalition for National Security Research (CNSR)

Crohn's and Colitis Foundation

CureHHT

Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer

debra of American

Digestive Disease National Coalition

Duke University

Duke University School of Medicine

Dystonia Medical Research Foundation

EB Research Partnership

Fight Colorectal Cancer

FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered

Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne

GBS|CIDP Foundation International

Global Health Technologies Coalition

Harvard University

Hepatitis B Foundation

HIV Medicine Association

Hydrocephalus Association

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Indiana University

International Foundation for Functional GI Disorders

International Myeloma Foundation

Interstitial Cystitis Association

KCAN-Kidney Cancer Action Network

Kidney Cancer Association

LAM Foundation

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

Littlest Tumor Foundation

Living Beyond Breast Cancer

Lung Cancer Alliance

LUNGevity Foundation

Lupus Foundation of America

Lymphedema Research & Education Network

Lymphoma Research Foundation

Malecare Cancer Support

METAvivor

The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research

Michigan State University

Michigan Technological University

Muscular Dystrophy Association

National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research

National Alliance of State Prostate Cancer Coalitions

National Autism Association

National Brain Tumor Society

National Fragile X Foundation

National Kidney Foundation

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD)

National Psoriasis Foundation

National Vietnam and Gulf War Veterans Coalition

NephCure Kidney International

Neurofibromatosis Midwest

Neurofibromatosis Network

Neurofibromatosis Northeast

Ovarian Cancer Research Fund Alliance

Pancreatic Cancer Action Network

Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy (PPMD)

Penn State University

Princeton University

Prostate Cancer Clinical Trials Consortium

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Prostate Cancer Foundation

Pulmonary Hypertension Association

Research!America

RLS Foundation

Scleroderma Foundation

Sergeant Sullivan Circle

Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation

Sleep Research Society

Society of Gynecologic Oncology

Susan G. Komen

TB Alliance

Texas NF Foundation

Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance

University of California System

University of Iowa

University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center

University of Pittsburgh

US Hereditary Angioedema Association

Us TOO International Prostate Cancer Education & Support

Vanderbilt University

Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Veterans for Common Sense

The Veterans Health Council

Vietnam Veterans of America

Weill Cornell Medicine

ZERO-The End of Prostate Cancer

Enclosure

cc: Members, House Appropriations Committee