## Congress of the United States Washington, DC 20515

May 20, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper Secretary Department of Defense 1000 Defense Pentagon Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Esper,

We appreciate your Department's recent extension of Title 32, Section 502(f) activations of the National Guard. By now nearly every state, territory and the District of Columbia has federally funded Soldiers and Airmen in the fight against COVID-19. Unfortunately, however, the Department's extension runs only until June 24, 2020; we urge you to consult with our governors and extend the Section 502(f) authorizations for the duration of the President's emergency and disaster declarations.

Furthermore, we note that a recent Politico article<sup>1</sup> highlighted the curious timing of the June 24<sup>th</sup> deadline. This deadline would leave many Guardsmen just shy of the 90 days of service required to qualify for certain benefits, like the Post-9/11 GI Bill. While we hope this is a coincidence, not policy, we request an explanation of the choice of expiration date. To battle this unprecedented crisis, we asked our neighbors in uniform to serve our nation in its time of need, and we hope the Department has not—and will not—nickel-and-dime its Soldiers and Airmen.

Those of us who have been to the frontlines of this crisis have seen the men and women of the National Guard deliver medical supplies to our hospitals, provide food to the hungry and care for our sick. Our states' plans to reopen safely require their continued contributions. We cannot give into the temptation to declare victory over this virus prematurely and walk away from our responsibility to our states. We urge you to continue to allow states to utilize one of the most effective tools at their disposal. Cutting off your Department's support to our states on June 24<sup>th</sup> would undermine our whole-of-nation response and shift the full burden to states whose budgets are already under great strain. We therefore ask that you consult with our governors to continue National Guard deployments for the duration of this crisis.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Ollstein, Alice Miranda. "'Hard stop': States could lose National Guard virus workers." *Politico*. https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/19/national-guard-coronavirus-267514.

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