

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 20, 2022

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Tester and Vice Chairman Shelby:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Department of Defense appropriations bill, we respectfully request maternal mental health be added as a research topic under the Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP). We appreciate your commitment to supporting research across the full range of science and medicine to enhance the well-being of our servicemembers, veterans, retirees, and their family members.

According to the Department of Defense and the Department of Veteran Affairs there are approximately 230,000 active-duty women¹ and nearly two million women veterans² in the United States. Each year 16,000 women on active-duty give birth³ and over 500,000 women veterans are under 40 years of age.⁴ This population has unique challenges given that servicemembers are generally required to return to duty six weeks postpartum and are typically considered deployable after four months.⁵

Research has shown that, given these unique challenges, military women experience higher rates of postpartum depression (PPD) than civilian women.⁶ Although risk factors for PPD overlap in military and civilian women, the Army is the only military branch that serves as a risk factor for PPD and further research is needed to understand this correlation.⁷ Further, a study in the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* on military spouses found that pregnant women with deployed partners are at higher risk for mental health issues during pregnancy and postpartum.⁸

¹ Department of Defense. (2021). 2021 Portrait of Active Duty Women. Department of Defense Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Fiscal Year 2021 Quarter 1 DoD Civilian Data. Retrieved from https://diversity.defense.gov/Portals/51/Women%202021_ACC.pdf

² Department of Veterans Affairs. (2014). National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp

³ Rychnovsky J, Beck CT: Screening for postpartum depression in military women with the Postpartum Depression Screening Scale. *Mil Med* 2006; 171(11): 1100-4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Valencia Garcia, MD, Eric Meyer, MD, Catherine Witkop, MD, MPH, Risk Factors for Postpartum Depression in Active Duty Women, *Military Medicine*, 2021; usab161, <https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usab161>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lauren Rose Godier-McBard, L Ibbitson, C Hooks, M Fossey. Military spouses with deployed partners are at greater risk of poor perinatal mental health: a scoping review. *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, 2019; jramc-2018-001069

Deployment was also correlated with an increased risk to the pregnant spouse of anxiety and sleep disorders.⁹

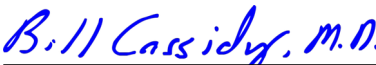
The addition of maternal mental health as a research topic under PRMRP would assist in informing the military if additional post deployment supports, reintegration programs or other services are warranted. According to the Military Family Advisory Network, a full family's experience is one of the top indicators for military retention. Additional research in this area would enhance our understanding of the complex needs of this population and ensure military readiness to further safeguard our servicemembers, their families, and the nation.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.


Sincerely,




Jon Ossoff
United States Senator




Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



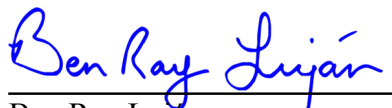
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



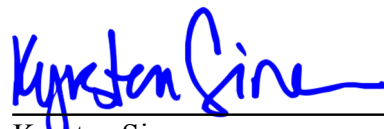
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