April 8, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
119 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Vice Chairman
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
113 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Durbin:

Thank you for your continued support for the Gulf War Illness Research Program (GWIRP) within the Department of Defense (DoD) Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), including the $22 million provided in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. As your Subcommittee begins work on the FY 2020 DoD Appropriations Bill, we are writing to share details of the program and to respectfully request that you include adequate funding to continue the GWIRP’s successful work on behalf of Gulf War veterans.

By congressional design, the GWIRP is a unique medical research program narrowly focused on a vision of improved health and lives of Veterans who have Gulf War Illness (GWI).[1] Successive reports by the congressionally-mandated Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans’ Illnesses (RAC) and the National Academy of Sciences (NASEM) have shown that: 1) Gulf War Illness (GWI) is a physical condition – likely caused by toxic exposures – that affects up to one-third of the nearly 700,000 veterans who served in the 1991 Persian Gulf War; 2) Debilitating GWI symptoms typically include "some combination of widespread pain, headache, persistent problems with memory and thinking, fatigue, breathing problems, stomach and intestinal symptoms, and skin abnormalities."[2][p.2],[3]

While two-thirds of GWIRP studies are still in progress, the positive news is that there is a growing body of GWIRP-funded study results, many published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, that demonstrates steady advances of GWIRP’s goals of identifying underlying mechanisms, diagnostic markers, and treatments. For example, the GWIRP-funded consortia at Boston University and Nova Southeastern University identified several potential treatments through their interdisciplinary preclinical and computational biology research projects; those treatments will now be tested in the Gulf War Illness Clinical Trials and Interventions Consortium (GWICTIC), which will include five clinical trials at seven study sites (three VA) to target GWI’s inflammation, energy production, and immune function issues.[4] And, the GWIRP-

funded Boston Biorepository, Recruitment, and Integrative Network (BBRAIN) will aggregate biological samples and data to further advance GWI diagnostic marker efforts. These successes are the direct result of clear treatment-focused congressional direction, stable appropriations for the GWIRP, and effective GWIRP management.

Recognizing the program's progress, the last RAC report's recommendations remain instructive: "Congress should maintain its funding to support the effective treatment-oriented [GWIRP]." These gradually building scientific results continue to represent encouraging steps toward achieving the 2010 NASEM treatment goals "to speed the development of effective treatments, cures, and, it is hoped, preventions" for current and future U.S. forces at risk of similar exposures and outcomes. Indeed, the GWIRP has served as a model of how to conduct treatment-oriented research to address a challenging illness and is succeeding where earlier programs failed. Its two-tier peer-reviewed and highly competitive process ensures the independence and value of the results produced. While VA’s research program is intramural (it only funds VA researchers), GWIRP is not similarly constrained and seeks to find and fund the best research by any combination of government, academic, or private-sector research teams.

We respectfully request that you provide the necessary resources to continue this vital and effective program in the FY20 DoD Appropriations Bill. Furthermore, it is critical to the program's success and accountability that it remains a stand-alone program within the CDMRP and not be combined as a topic area within broader, less-targeted research programs.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, which is supported by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Veterans for Common Sense, the National Gulf War Resource Center, National Vietnam and Gulf War Veterans Coalition, Sergeant Sullivan Circle, and Burn Pits 360.

Sincerely,

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Jon Tester
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator
Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
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Jacky Rosen
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United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator