April 7, 2019

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

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Senate Committee on Appropriations
115 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Durbin,

Vietnam Veterans of American and Veterans for Common Sense support the inclusion in the fiscal year 2020 Defense Appropriations Act of "peripheral neuropathy" among the disorders and conditions eligible for research funding under the Peer-Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP) within the Department of Defense (DoD) Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP).

Affecting more than 20 million Americans, peripheral neuropathy refers to the many conditions that involve damage to the peripheral nervous system. The disabling symptoms of peripheral neuropathy typically include pain (sometimes severe), prickling, and/or numbness in the hands and feet that may spread to the arms and legs. Symptoms may also include extreme sensitivity to touch; sleep difficulties; significant mobility problems; poor balance and falls; tremors; heat intolerance and altered sweating; muscle wasting, weakness, and paralysis; and bowel, bladder, or digestive problems.

Peripheral neuropathy is common among the veterans community, particularly those diagnosed with diabetes, hepatitis C, and HIV. Cancer patients who have undergone chemotherapy treatment commonly develop peripheral neuropathy. The Gulf War Illness Research Program (GWIRP) has supported some promising research studies on the correlation between Gulf War Illness and Small Fiber Peripheral Neuropathy (SFPN) – one of more than 100 types of peripheral neuropathy, each with its own symptoms and disease course. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), under specific conditions, presumes veterans' early-onset peripheral neuropathy is related to their exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during service.

The mission of DoD PRMRP's is to "improve the health, care, and well-being of all Military Service members, Veterans, and beneficiaries." Broad peripheral neuropathy research across the full spectrum of military and veteran populations will enhance rather than duplicate existing federal government research efforts, bringing us closer to finding a cure for more than 20 million

Americans coping with these debilitating conditions – including the untold numbers of Vietnam, Gulf War, and other veterans and current and future military service members.

We therefore urge you to include the designation of "peripheral neuropathy" among the eligible disorders studied by the PRMRP in the fiscal year 2020 Defense Appropriations Act. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Rick Weidman
Executive Director for Policy
Vietnam Veterans of America

Anthony Hardie
National Board Chair & Director
Veterans for Common Sense

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