

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2021

The Honorable Max Rose
Senior COVID-19 Advisor to the Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Rose,

On behalf of the Defense Communities Caucus, we are contacting you today about a critical issue involving DoD's COVID-19 response. While the military is quickly vaccinating its service members, injection rates in the greater defense communities – that are home to 70% of our military families – are likely going to face significant obstacles. While recent Gallup polls show 58% of Americans would agree to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, a recent survey of military families shows that the rate in their population may be much lower – around 33%. While this is still an evolving process, low vaccination rates among military families and within the defense communities they call home could have significant impacts on the military's overall readiness.

In another recent survey of military spouses, just over 30% of respondents reported that they either lost their job (17%) or were forced to take significantly reduced hours (14%) due to the pandemic. In addition, 44% of military families with children reported significant disruptions to childcare and in-person school, including 17% of mission essential personnel, resulting in further spouse job losses and reduced mission readiness. Reaching CDC-recommended vaccination rates in these communities will ensure our installations regain mission readiness and local job opportunities for spouses. It will mean our military families can regain their readiness, our military impacted schools can open, and economic vitality can return.

As you plan your ongoing COVID-19 vaccination outreach, we urge you to make sure there is specific focus on encouraging vaccinations among military families as well as the broader communities our military calls home. It will provide a foundation for returning our military to full readiness.

Throughout the last year, we have learned that COVID-19 does not recognize fence lines and overcoming its many challenges requires a “one community” approach. Therefore, we recommend the Department's outreach efforts extend beyond service members and families. We specifically recommend you reach out to the Association of Defense Communities (ADC), a nonprofit organization that unites the 300 plus communities, regions, and states that serve as home to our military. ADC has been active in supporting communities and families through the initiative and is uniquely positioned to support outreach to communities on this important issue. We urge the department to find ways to collaborate and support ADC's efforts. You can contact ADC Executive Director Matt Borron directly at mborron@defensecommunities.org.

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Thank you for your attention to this important issue and your leadership in making certain that our nation's military is responsive to the ongoing public health crisis. We look forward to your continued engagement and support.

Respectfully,



Gary Peters
United States Senator
Defense Community Caucus Co-Chair



Jerry Moran
United States Senator
Defense Community Caucus Co-Chair