

United States Senate

May 20, 2020

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to express concerns that deployments of National Guard members in COVID-19 response efforts may end prematurely, denying these service members benefits they would otherwise accrue. If Title 32 orders for guardsmen “hard stop” on June 24th, as has been reported, for many who were activated at the start of the pandemic it would be just one day shy of the 90 day threshold necessary to receive benefits for active duty service. These brave men and women in uniform would be shortchanged on benefits and pulled from the frontlines when their contributions are still urgently needed.

Members of the National Guard play a critical role in many states’ COVID-19 response efforts. More than 40,000 Guard members in 44 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia are on federal orders working for states. Since early March, thousands of Guard personnel have been on full-time orders supporting a range of high-risk tasks, including decontaminating nursing homes, setting up field hospitals, COVID-19 testing, logistics and warehouse distribution, emergency planning, and more. Additionally, they help fill personnel gaps in understaffed and underfunded public health agencies. States remain dependent on the support of National Guard personnel and there are no indications these needs will disappear by June 24th.

Ending orders on June 24th would leave thousands of guardsmen, including 991 in Michigan, with just 89 days of active duty. As you know, there is a 90-day threshold to qualify for education benefits and early retirement credit. Those service members who would be cheated by this policy are serving their communities, their states, and their country. Their mobilization to support COVID-19 response efforts have already disrupted their lives and risked exposing them to the virus. Purposefully withholding benefits they have earned would be an insult and harm morale, recruiting, and retention within the National Guard.

Each state’s mission should dictate the duration of Guard mobilizations. Arbitrarily cutting deployments short would leave communities under-resourced and backfilling those capabilities may be costly and burdensome and localities. I urge you to continue Guard deployments as conditions on the ground require, both for the sake of individual guardsmen serving their communities and for the sake of the communities which depend on them.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Cc: Secretary of Defense Mark Esper
Administrator Peter Gaynor