

United States Senate

July 30, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We are writing to advocate for the needs of our nation's veterans, transitioning service members, and their families in the next COVID-19 legislative response package. The transition for our service members back to civilian life can be difficult no matter the circumstances. Given the added challenge due to the current pandemic, we believe Congress must do everything in our power to support our veterans and transitioning service members, especially by addressing their workforce development, employment, and economic needs.

Veterans' unemployment rates are rising due to COVID-19. During the Great Recession from 2007-2009 studies show that veterans who recently transitioned to civilian life faced higher unemployment rates than both older veterans and non-veterans. These studies also indicate increased veterans' suicide rates during the Great Recession, tied in part to less economic opportunity. Accordingly, we are concerned that the adverse economic conditions stemming from COVID-19 could cause similar harm to the veterans' community today. Therefore, we believe that additional targeted veterans and transitioning service members' workforce policy improvements are needed across several federal agencies to respond to COVID-19 and to ensure economic stability for veterans in the long-term.

Specifically, we request support for the following:

- GI Bill benefit coverage for veterans who are nontraditional students in Registered Apprenticeship and On-the-Job Training programs. These programs are critical career pathways for veterans and transitioning service members, and they have been

disproportionately disrupted by COVID-19 because they are more difficult to move to online platforms, making it difficult for enrolled veterans to earn required On-the-Job hours. Congress has already addressed GI Bill benefit coverage during COVID-19 for veterans enrolled in higher education. Veterans in apprenticeship and On-the-Job Training programs deserve parity.

- Funding for the Department of Labor’s Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) for veterans. RAP programs provide paid, work- and classroom-based educational opportunities for veterans, resulting in the earning of an industry-recognized credential. Increased funding for RAP will provide additional veterans with immediate skills and employment opportunities, designed to fit industry needs.
- Increasing access for veterans and transitioning service members to additional skilled training programs. In addition to RAP, we also advocate that resources be provided to the following entities that provide high-quality, proven career pathways for veterans and transitioning service members: veterans service organizations (VSOs), state-level workforce development agencies, the Department of Defense’s (DoD) SkillBridge initiative, the U.S. Military Apprenticeship Program (USMAP), and community colleges.
- Recognizing veterans’ service-connected skills through enhancements to our existing credentialing system. Service members leave the military with an incredible amount of education and skills. We must ensure federal and state licensing bodies better understand and can translate veterans’ experiences, so that they can more quickly put their training to work in our communities.

We appreciate your leadership and the work you have done to support our veterans and our country during this challenging time. We urge you to take the steps outlined in this letter in the next COVID-19 response package to support our veterans, transitioning service members, and their families as they navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you in advance for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you on these issues.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator