

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 17, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Secretary Hegseth,

We write today to express our deep concern that the Department of Defense (DoD) has seemingly abandoned its efforts to ensure that military servicemembers have equal access to quality health care within the Military Health System (MHS) and that servicemembers and military families of color and from under-represented communities experience equal health outcomes as their white counterparts. This is particularly alarming as it relates to maternal health outcomes and the health of new and expectant mothers in the MHS.

We were alarmed to discover that websites detailing DoD's efforts to ensure equal quality of care and health outcomes for servicemembers were deleted and that reports detailing how DoD has improved or is aiming to improve health care services at military treatment facilities for minority servicemembers and their families have been removed from online archives and report libraries. A search through the Defense Health Agency's (DHA) Publications Library shows that searches for "health disparities" and similar terms that touch on the intersection of race and health have been completely removed despite the incredibly useful information these reports contain on improving health outcomes for our servicemembers.

This is alarming as previous reports noted significant differences exist in mental health outcomes, surgical outcomes, and maternal health outcomes within the MHS. One such report, "Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities in the Military Health System" which was released in 2023, detailed how differences in maternal health outcomes were among the largest statistically significant variations in health outcomes in the military health system. The report further noted that there are notable shortcomings in how DoD and DHA in particular collect and track data on race and ethnicity for the purposes of monitoring health outcomes and that improving those practices may better allow DoD to ensure that it provides mothers and expectant mothers of all races more comprehensive health care.

The 2023 report further noted that DoD has taken a number of steps to address maternal health disparities in the MHS. These included the implementation of measures to decrease first-birth cesarean rates, promote in-hospital initiation of breast feeding, and provide perinatal training for all health care staff caring for pregnant persons. Importantly, these steps also included implementing the Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health Safety Bundle on Postpartum Hemorrhage (PPH), which is a structured way to improve care and patient outcomes through best practices to recognize, prevent, and rapidly respond to PPH, one of the leading causes of deaths for mothers during childbirth. The scrubbing of these reports from DoD raises serious questions regarding whether DHA is continuing to roll out improvements to address disparities in maternal health outcomes and how we are tracking data to ensure that these changes are implemented in the most effective manner.

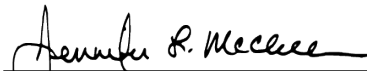
With that in mind, we have the following questions for DoD and DHA:


- Is the DHA continuing to implement the Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health Safety Bundle on PPH across the MHS?
- Is DHA continuing to ensure that all health care staff who care for pregnant patients have training on perinatal training across the MHS?
- Are there additional steps that DoD and DHA are taking to address the significantly higher incidences of PPH and other leading causes of maternal mortality at MHS that disproportionately affect women of color?
- Is DoD ensuring that it has adequate data to address disparities in maternal health and effectively implementing best practices despite directives from the Secretary of Defense?
  - If so, how is DoD gathering this data and what improvements have been made to ensure the quality and usefulness of the data?
  - If not, what is DoD's reasoning for refusing to gather data that could save the lives of both newborns and their mothers?

The health of our servicemembers and their families is a key issue we must address as we seek to improve the quality of life for those who dedicate their lives to protecting this nation. Given the gravity of these concerns, we look forward to your expedient response to this matter.

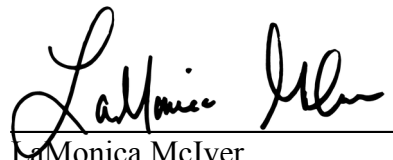
Sincerely,


Sincerely,


  
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Jennifer L. McClellan  
Member of Congress

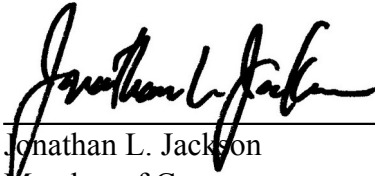
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Marilyn Strickland  
Member of Congress


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Joyce Beatty  
Member of Congress


  
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LaMonica McIver  
Member of Congress

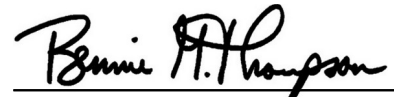
  
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Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress


  
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Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress


  
Jonathan L. Jackson  
Member of Congress


  
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

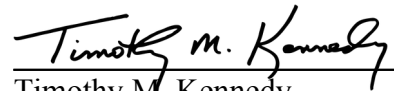
  
Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress

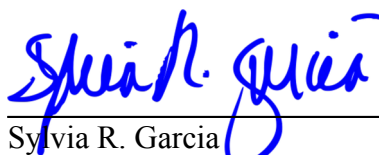
  
Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress

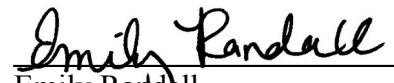
  
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress

  
Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress

  
Diana DeGette  
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Timothy M. Kennedy  
Member of Congress

  
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Emily Randall  
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