

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 31, 2024

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Chair  
House Committee on Armed Services  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Armed Services  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Member Smith,

As you work to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (FY25 NDAA), we write to urge that you reject any provisions, particularly those found in the House version of the bill, that undermine diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives at the Department of Defense (DoD). While subject to vicious and often untrue, politically motivated attacks, these initiatives are key to ensuring that our military is representative of our nation and is able to support the needs of the diverse group of men and women who constitute its ranks.

One of the key strengths of the United States and its military is diversity. Diversity of race, ethnicity, background, gender, economic background, and sexual orientation contribute to new ideas, new perspectives, and new ways of thinking that allow for more robust decision-making, better planning for contingencies, and the development of well-thought-out and analyzed strategies that will be key to maintaining our military advantage in an age of increased great-power competition. This is only achieved by actively working to recruit a diverse military and ensuring that we have systems in place to support our servicemembers. DoD's DEI initiatives are the most concrete action to accomplish that work and create a culture where all servicemembers feel welcome, free from harassment, and supported to be the best warfighters possible.

Unfortunately, the House version of the NDAA includes numerous provisions that significantly undercut DoD's efforts to recruit and retain a diverse and representative military. These provisions include:


- The complete elimination of the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion at DoD;
- Language that would institute a hiring freeze for DEI work at DoD;
- The elimination of the Chief Diversity Equity and Inclusion Officer role at DoD;
- Prohibitions on the creation of DEI offices at service academies; and
- The implementation of severe pay cuts for DoD employees who work on DEI issues.


This non-exhaustive list represents the types of provisions included within the House-passed NDAA that we must reject. Provisions such as those highlighted above only reinforce the idea that DoD is not welcoming to prospective women and minority recruits at a time when our enlistment goals rely heavily on better recruitment and retention of individuals from all backgrounds.


A 2021 study by Blue Star Families noted that nearly one in three servicemembers of color experienced at least one incident of harassment or racial profiling on base, and approximately one in five servicemembers have reported being subject to racist slurs or jokes.<sup>1</sup> This is a pervasive issue that DoD has taken significant steps to address through the implementation of DEI initiatives. Additionally, communities that experience discrimination are much less likely to encourage young individuals to join the military. The same 2021 Blue Star Families study highlighted that military families that had experienced discrimination or harassment during service were more likely to discourage their children from joining the Armed Forces in the future. Any rollback of these efforts would not only undo the progress made in fostering a more inclusive environment for servicemembers of color but also risk hindering recruitment among future generations of Americans, who are increasingly diverse.


Defending our nation is a serious endeavor, and it is of the utmost importance that we focus on creating the most robust, well-qualified, effective, and representative military possible to ensure that we are able to face the threats ahead. To that end, we urge that in the final text of the NDAA you reject any harmful policies currently included in either the House or Senate version of the bill targeting DoD's DEI efforts that could reverse the important work we have achieved in achieving these goals.

Sincerely,

  
Jennifer L. McClellan  
Member of Congress

  
Marc A. Veasey  
Member of Congress

  
André Carson  
Member of Congress

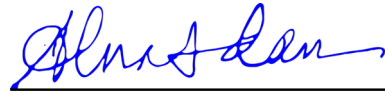
  
Jasmine Crockett  
Member of Congress

<sup>1</sup> Blue Star Families, *Social Impact Research 2021: The Diverse Experiences of Military & Veteran Families of Color*, [https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/BSF\\_MFC\\_REI\\_FullReport2021-final.pdf](https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/BSF_MFC_REI_FullReport2021-final.pdf) 2021



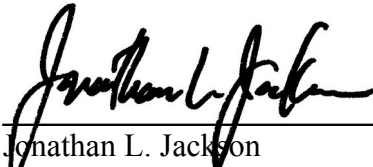
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Marilyn Strickland  
Member of Congress



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Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.  
Member of Congress



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Jonathan L. Jackson  
Member of Congress



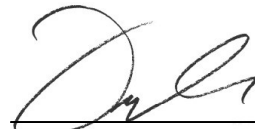
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Joyce Beatty  
Member of Congress



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JM Tokuda  
Member of Congress



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Troy Carter  
Member of Congress



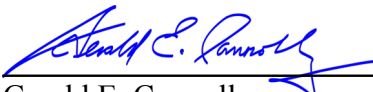
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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



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Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress



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Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress



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Maxwell Alejandro Frost  
Member of Congress



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Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress




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Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress



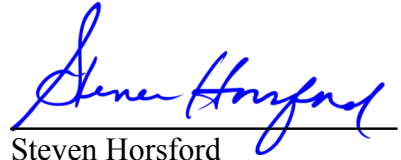
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Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress



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Shontel M. Brown  
Member of Congress



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Steven Horsford  
Member of Congress



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Robert Garcia  
Member of Congress