

May 5, 2022

Dear Secretary Austin and Secretary Vilsack,

Thank you for your leadership in acknowledging the challenges of food insecurity for military families, working to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the contributing factors and impacts, and collaborating on data collection and analysis to inform effective solutions. We appreciate the Biden Administration's support for the establishment of a Military Family Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) in the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, and we write to you with specific recommendations for implementation of the BNA.

We are aware that to accomplish these goals will require a unique but imperative collaboration between Administration leadership, DoD, and USDA in crafting a rule to implement the BNA. We urge DoD and Administration leadership to utilize the deep expertise of USDA around effective responses to food insecurity, and actively engage them in the implementation process for the new BNA program. USDA can offer meaningful insights into process, structure and delivery models based on decades of experience in administering the nation's premier food security program, SNAP, and 14 other nutrition programs that support our nation's citizens. We urge you to include the following specific recommendations in the program implementation regulations to ensure that the BNA is effective and impactful in addressing the preventable crisis of military hunger:

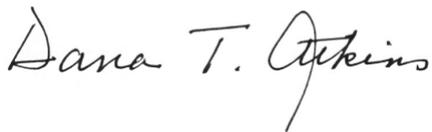
- **Establish the Basic Needs Allowance as expansively as possible, ensuring the program reaches the maximum number of military families struggling with food insecurity.** Use a thoughtful methodology grounded in the actual circumstances of military families to determine where the BAH will be excluded; the full amount of the BAH should always be excluded.
- **Streamline access to the Basic Needs Allowance and ensure it is an "opt-out" program to maximize participation and reduce stigma.** Establish the BNA with automatic enrollment of all who are eligible based on the Department's screening; allow servicemembers to submit applications and additional documentation for the allowance after enrollment or to decline the allowance in writing if they prefer not to receive it.
- **Collect data essential for providing a more comprehensive understanding of the military hunger issue and evaluating the effectiveness of the BNA in reducing food insecurity rates for military families and the positive impacts of the program in contributing to other DOD priorities,** including troop readiness, retention, recruitment, racial equity, suicide rates for servicemembers and military family members, and health outcomes for those in military households.
- **Change the military culture that has exacerbated shame and stigma around the food insecurity issue.** Create training materials for leadership and educational resources about military food insecurity in order to reduce stigma and more effectively connect military families with available resources.
- **Establish an Advisory Board made up of representatives of key stakeholder organizations, other relevant federal agencies, and individuals with lived experience** to provide guidance and oversight for the implementation and operations of the Basic Needs Allowance.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input for the implementation of the Basic Needs Allowance. We look forward to opportunities to work together and contribute to efforts to establish this critical new program.

Sincerely,



Abby J. Leibman
President and CEO
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger



Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret.)
President and Chief Executive Officer
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Cc: Ambassador Susan Rice, Director, Domestic Policy Council
Rory Brosius, Executive Director, Joining Forces