



March 17, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The TRICARE for Kids Coalition, a stakeholder group committed to ensuring TRICARE meets the unique health care needs of military children, urges you to reconsider proposed military medical billet cuts. Medical manpower reductions risk access to care challenges in the military system of hospitals and clinics as well as the TRICARE purchased care network for children of both military and civilian families across our nation.

The FY 2020 and 2021 administration budget requests proposed reducing military medical end strength by nearly 18,000 billets, an 18% cut to uniformed medical personnel. There has been minimal visibility on planned cuts even though Sec. 719 of the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) required a report to Congress including detailed reviews, analysis, metrics, and mitigation plans before any reduction or realignment of medical personnel takes place.

Despite the lack of official details on planned cuts, TFK Coalition members have heard pediatric billets are likely to be heavily impacted with reported cuts ranging from 20 to 40% of uniformed pediatric providers, depending on the Service. Loss of uniformed billets will almost certainly result in lack of access to medically necessary care in many communities, immediately and long term, for military children and their families.

There are also reports that training positions could also be reduced. The Military Health System (MHS) plays a significant role in our national medical provider pipeline and we are concerned billet cuts at the Uniform Services University and other graduate medical education (GME) training programs could negatively impact the national number of pediatricians, obstetrician-gynecologists, family medicine physicians, and other providers yielding devastating results for military families and all Americans who rely on providers trained by MHS programs for essential health care services.

The current pandemic has also highlighted the risks of cutting surge capacity within the military health system. Uniformed providers have played critical roles throughout the whole of nation response to COVID-19, most recently deploying to staff FEMA vaccination sites across the country. We must ensure our military medical system can work in support of national surge capacity to fulfill the crisis response mission without compromising beneficiary access to essential medical care.

Thank you for considering our Coalition's concerns about medical manpower reductions as DoD develops the FY 2022 administration budget request. We appreciate your continued support of our nation's service members, veterans, their families, and survivors.

Sincerely,

Kara Tollett Oakley

Kara Tollett Oakley, Chair
TRICARE for Kids Coalition

CC: The Honorable Kathleen Hicks, Deputy Secretary of Defense
Ms. Virginia Penrod, Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
Dr. Terry Adirim, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs
Lieutenant General Ronald Place, Director, Defense Health Agency