Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As you work to address previously unmet and newly emerging needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, we respectfully request consideration to prioritize ensuring food security for low-income military families who face heightened challenges at this time.

While tens of millions of Americans regularly struggle with food insecurity, and many more households will newly encounter difficulty putting food on the table as a result of the devastating public health crisis, the challenges of food insecurity for junior enlisted military families are greatly exacerbated. As Congress considers much-needed actions to increase Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to respond to the general increases in need and to contribute to our national recovery effort, we should also correct a long-overlooked technical issue that has prevented low-income military families from qualifying for needed federal nutrition assistance.

This is neither an isolated problem, nor a novel one. Today, food pantries operate on or near every military base in the country. These pantries serve military families in need of charitable food assistance because they are ineligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits due to a technical barrier in the law. Specifically, under current law, a servicemember’s Basic Allowance for Housing is counted as income for the purposes of determining SNAP benefits. As a result, low-income service members with dependents, especially those living in counties with a high cost of living, often do not qualify for the program despite needing assistance.

The COVID-19 pandemic is adding to the hardships that too many military families already face, including higher rates of unemployment and underemployment for military spouses (unemployment rates for military spouses were at 24% before the pandemic), more limited availability of affordable childcare, and school closures that may intensify difficulties for the numerous children from military families that receive free or reduced price school breakfast and lunch. Out-of-pocket expenses for relocation costs, to resolve substandard housing problems, and to pay for hospital bills if a family member falls ill are other timely and unique factors for military families. In addition, thousands of National Guard activations across the country will present economic challenges for additional households.

Data from the Blue Star Families Pain Points Poll conducted between March 18-22, 2020 reveals that military spouses are already losing jobs and/or working reduced hours as a result of the current crisis, adding to prevalent concerns about economic stability for a high percentage of military families.
We ask so much of our military families on a regular basis. At this time of national crisis, when service members face even greater challenges, we owe it to them to ensure that they can meet the basic needs of their families and do not have to worry about putting food on the table.

As you work to craft additional legislation to respond to our national needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the growing challenge of food insecurity, we respectfully request consideration of a provision to remove the barrier to accessing needed federal nutrition assistance for currently serving military families.

Military hunger and troop readiness go hand in hand. A simple provision to exclude the Basic Allowance for Housing as counted income for determining eligibility for federal nutrition assistance programs would ensure that service members are able to provide the basic needs for their family members, eliminate unnecessary stress and anxiety, and contribute to optimal mission readiness. Those who are willing to fight and die for our nation should never have to struggle to put food on the table for their families.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you to address this issue.

Sincerely,

Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

Don Young
Member of Congress

/s/ Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

/s/ Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

/s/ Hon. Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/ Scott Peters
Member of Congress

/s/ Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/ Al Lawson
Member of Congress

/s/ Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

/s/ Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress
Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy
April 24, 2020
Page 3 of 4

/s/ Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

/s/ Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/ James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/ Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/ David B. McKinley, P.E.
Member of Congress

/s/ Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

/s/ Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

/s/ Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

/s/ Chris Pappas
Member of Congress

/s/ Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

/s/ Dean Phillips
Member of Congress

/s/ Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

/s/ Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress

/s/ Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

/s/ Jason Crow
Member of Congress

/s/ Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

/s/ Sanford D. Bishop Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/ Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

/s/ Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

/s/ Mark Takano
Member of Congress
Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy
April 24, 2020
Page 4 of 4

/s/ G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress

/s/ Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

/s/ Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress

/s/ Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

/s/ Jared Golden
Member of Congress

/s/ Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

/s/ Mike Levin
Member of Congress

/s/ Bill Foster
Member of Congress

/s/ Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

/s/ Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

/s/ Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress

/s/ John Yarmuth
Member of Congress

/s/ Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Cc: House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson
    House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member K. Michael Conaway
    House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Chairman Sanford Bishop Jr.
    House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Ranking Member Jeff Fortenberry