

April 28, 2018

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Thornberry and McCain and Ranking Members Smith and Reed,

As you approach mark-up of the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the undersigned management organizations, unions, and travel industry trade associations urge you to support Department of Defense (DOD) military and civilian employees by ending a practice that penalizes personnel who volunteer or receive orders requiring them to travel on temporary duty for more than 30 days. The House of Representatives has voted to repeal these cuts for three consecutive years in the NDAA (most recently in Section 604 of the House-passed FY 2018 NDAA) and we hope that this year the full Congress will adopt that position.

In November 2014, DOD made changes to the Joint Travel Regulations (JTR) that included a 25 percent cut to both the per diem rates for lodging and meals for travel in excess of 30 days, and a 45 percent cut for travel longer than 180 days. Although intended to save the government money, it is far from clear that that goal has been achieved. A Government Accountability Office report, required under the FY 2016 NDAA and released in May 2017, found that “DOD did not ensure that certain required processes established in DOD guidance were completed prior to the policy’s approval, and its assessment of the policy’s costs and benefits was not comprehensive... As a result, DOD may not be well positioned to understand whether the flat rate per diem policy is cost-beneficial and meeting its objectives to reduce travel costs without negatively affecting the traveler and the mission.” These findings are in line with views expressed by the Naval Sea Systems Command in a 2016 letter which stated that the cuts were perhaps driving up overall costs because less experienced workers were filling the roles of more senior employees, and thus required more time and oversight to complete their tasks. More alarmingly, these dynamics were endangering the ability of shipyards to deliver the fleet on time.

Further, these cuts unfairly burden DOD military and civilian employees and frustrate the ability of the hotel industry to offer a government rate or adequate service for DOD travelers. Our members have shared numerous stories of workers being unable to find appropriate lodging options and being forced to use their own money for expenses directly related to official travel. Currently, many of those who travel for long-term duty assignments do so regularly, and have a

wealth of knowledge and experience, which is important to the military mission. The current cuts to the long-term travel per diem allowance creates a disincentive for these employees to continue to volunteer for these long-term travel assignments, and penalizes the military and civilian employees who have already been asked to spend a significant amount of time away from their homes and families.

For all these reasons, we ask that you include language repealing the cuts to long-term per diem rates in the FY 2019 NDAA. Should you or your staff have any questions regarding this request please contact Alethea Predeoux at alethea.predeoux@afge.org or at 202-639-6953; or Craig Kalkut from the American Hotel & Lodging Association at ckalkut@ahla.com or at 202-289-3126.

Thank you.

American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO
American Hotel & Lodging Association
Federal Managers Association
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers
U.S. Travel Association