



Coalition and Valued Associates Advocacy and Actions...

The briefing document on *The Defense Commissary System: Understanding Commissary Value, Benefits, and Impacts* was shared with the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) and Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Defense Staffers as well as the House and Senate Appropriation Committees MLA's over the past two weeks. The updated document can be accessed directly through <http://qrs.ly/aq3xscm>.

In addition to submitting testimony for the record and testifying before the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee and the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel, Coalition Valued Associate organizations have been "Storming the Hill" and meeting with Congressional Members and staffers to address the devastating impact of the proposed budget cuts and continued sequestration on service members and their families.

Valued Associate organizations are strongly supporting the [Military Commissary Sustainment Act](#) introduced by Senators Mark. R. Warner (D-VA) and Saxby Chambliss (R-GA), and the companion House bill introduced by Representative J. Randy Forbes (R-VA-04). The legislation prohibits the reduction in commissary funding pending a comprehensive report from the nonpartisan Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission due in February 2015.

Valued Associates continue to stress to Congress that there should be no changes to service members' compensation, benefits, and retirement before the commission's final report. They also strongly oppose any reductions in appropriations for the commissary and exchange systems or proposals that mandate consolidation. They continue to stress that slashing commissary benefits will reduce critical savings for service members and their families, amounting to a tax on military families and a loss of nearly \$3,000 in purchasing power. Many believe the drastic proposal is a backdoor way to undermine the commissary benefit: by raising prices and slashing savings, patrons will no longer shop at the commissary, forcing them to close, and impacting exchanges and vital Morale Welfare and Recreation programs.

A recent article by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) also points out that service members and their families do not support these cuts to pay and benefits.

What Are the Troops Saying?

Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)

April 4, 2014

Despite public statements by senior DoD military and civilian leadership in public hearings and the press, recent studies and blog posts indicate military personnel do not support cuts to pay and benefits within the FY 2015 budget proposal.

Uniformed and civilian defense leaders hope Congress will accept their anecdotal stories citing troops and their families are in favor of making pay and benefit concessions in order to have appropriate training and equipment and accept their proposals to curb active duty pay, reduce the housing allowance, dramatically cut the commissary benefit, and foist more health care fees on retirees and currently serving families.

We are not questioning their anecdotal survey of troops; however, in stark contrast, the recent [survey by the Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation](#) found that 83 percent of post-9/11 servicemembers and veterans oppose cuts to pay and benefits.

Articles such as Military.com's, "[Generals say Troops Understand Need for Pay Cuts.](#)" outline the Pentagon's case, but the 1,800-plus comments below the article make it clear that their readers soundly reject the proposals.

MOAA understands the difficult predicament the Pentagon now faces, but the "quadruple whammy" of capping pay, increasing out-of-pocket housing expenses, slashing commissary benefits, and cutting health care benefits would be four giant steps toward repeating the short-sighted cuts which led to retention and readiness problems in the past.

The solution to funding training and equipment should not be on the backs of troops and their families who have already served and sacrificed so much for our nation. Nor should Congress undo the very fixes they put in place over the past decade to combat the severe recruiting and retention crisis experienced in the 90s.

Congress established the Military Compensation Retirement and Modernization Commission (MCRMC) to study the current compensation system and suggest reforms. Jumping the gun with piecemeal, budget-driven changes before the study concludes would be a rash decision.

Secretary Hagel stated before the FY 2015 budget release that, "Continuous piecemeal changes will only magnify uncertainty and doubts among our servicemembers about whether promised benefits will be there in the future."

We couldn't agree more and we hope Congress shares our view.