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The Honorable Jon Tester The Honorable Susan Collins

Chair Ranking Member

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense Defense

Room S-128, The Capitol Room S-128, The Capitol

Washington, D.C. 20515 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Tester and Ranking Member Collins:

As you begin deliberations on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 defense appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you ***continue to include esophageal cancer as a disease eligible for research funding through the Department of Defense (DoD) Peer Reviewed Cancer Research Program (PRCRP).***

Esophageal cancer is the seventh leading cause of cancer-related death among American men. In addition, four out of five patients (approximately 80 percent) die within five years of receiving an esophageal cancer diagnosis. It is one of American’s deadliest cancers, largely because little effective treatment, scarce early detection, and no screening guidelines exist for this disease.

Further, many of those at greatest risk for esophageal cancer are men over the age of 55 who have a history of gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD), tobacco and/or alcohol use, and/or obesity – all risks that are higher in the country's veteran population compared to the general population. Of increased concern, recent research shows that the incidence of esophageal adenocarcinoma, the most prevalent form of this cancer in the U.S., has tripled among younger patients in the last few decades. That means our warfighters and their families are also at increased risk, and the studies show that these patients typically present with late-stage disease when treatment is rarely successful.

Our military personnel and veterans also have additional risks. In fact, the VA has already established that there is a presumption of service connection for esophageal cancer due to radiation and burn pit exposure. There is also a link to the contaminated drinking water at U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina from the 1950s to the 1980s. Veterans and their families who were stationed there were potentially exposed to drinking water contaminated with industrial solvents, benzene, and other chemicals that have been linked to esophageal cancer.

We greatly appreciate you including esophageal cancer in the PRCRP for the last five years. Given the lack of early detection tools and effective treatments, it is critical that esophageal cancer continues to be included in the PRCRP. A hallmark of the PRCRP is its focus on high-risk, high- reward research, which makes it inherently different than the approach used by the National Cancer Institute. By continuing to include esophageal cancer as a disease eligible for funding under the PRCRP, Congress will be giving all American men and women diagnosed with esophageal cancer a fighting chance for survival and a new hope for the future.

Congress established the PRCRP in FY 2009 to support research into specifically designated cancers with relevance to military service members and their families. Esophageal cancer clearly meets those criteria, particularly given the burden that it has and is projected to have on the military and veteran population and the fact that the VA and Congress have already recognized links between military service and esophageal cancer. ***We respectfully request that you continue to include esophageal cancer as a disease eligible for research funding in PRCRP for FY 2025.*** With your support, we will open new avenues of research to stop the devastation caused by this disease in both our military and civilian populations.

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