

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1309

May 11, 2020

## VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Mark Esper  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1400 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Esper:

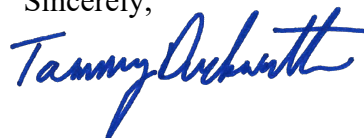
I am writing to express concern over the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) interim guidance on issuing a medical qualification determination for an applicant with a history of a confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) diagnosis rendered from a medical clinic or laboratory test. I also want to register my opposition to the initial DoD guidance that classified any confirmed COVID-19 survivor as permanently disqualified from military service.

Scientific and medical experts are still learning about COVID-19. The United States Military Entrance Processing Command's (USMEPCOM) guidance should be informed by the best available scientific research and medical advice from infectious disease experts. Given existing uncertainty over COVID-19 infections, it may be prudent for USMEPCOM to be cautious until we better understand the long-term implications of COVID-19 infections.

However, DoD must not allow inertia to make permanent blunt, far-reaching policies that were quickly produced in the midst of a deadly global pandemic. Accordingly, I am requesting that DoD consult with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health to begin developing long-term standards informed by emerging knowledge of COVID-19, while expediting the establishment of an effective, science-based waiver policy and process to efficiently evaluate individuals classified as permanently disqualified due to a COVID-19 hospitalization.

COVID-19 threatens to further erode our Nation's troubling military readiness. A significant portion of our population aged 17 to 24 years old is already ineligible for military service because of health, physical appearance or educational background. DoD cannot afford to further restrict the pool of eligible military recruits through overly broad COVID-19 guidance that renders a significant number of Americans permanently disqualified from military service. Thank you in advance for working with me to improve the resiliency of the military accessions program during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator