United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 10, 2026

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith:

As you prepare to conference the Fiscal Year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I respectfully urge you to retain Sections 501 and 502 of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) NDAA in the final bill and strengthen those sections by adding language that would require timely written notification within seven days, including a clear justification and basis for the decision, to the affected individual officer when said officer is subject of a promotion withhold, delay or removal.

Since January 2025, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has removed at least 40 officers from the one- and two-star promotion lists after a promotion board reviewed these officers' records and independently determined that they demonstrated exemplary service that warranted promotion to the General or Flag Officer ranks. Secretary Hegseth has disproportionately withheld the promotion of women and people of color, sidelining talented servicemembers and attacking the long-standing merit-based promotion board system of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD).

Affected officers have been left without clear justification for these life-altering decisions. The Services have so far haphazardly notified officers via different mediums, sometimes only verbally, failing to provide affected officers with fulsome justifications for why their promotions are being affected. In many cases, exemplary officers have found out about their promotion decisions through the press. This is a disgraceful mistreatment of our heroes in uniform that brings shame to our Nation.

The effect on servicemembers is chilling. Dozens of Colonels, Captains, one-star general and flag officers and their families—who honorably served our country for over 20 years—have been left in limbo. Without written notification about these promotion decisions, they are left with limited recourse to submit written appeals for reconsideration and without anything in writing to share with potential future employers as they are effectively forced out of serving their country in uniform.

Irrespective of statute, regulation or policy, Secretary Hegseth's disrespectful and dishonorable treatment of American officers who have dedicated their lives to serving in the U.S. Armed Forces is clearly wrong.

However, this egregious aberrant failure of leadership has revealed the reality that current law, regulation and policy is unacceptably vague regarding when and how DoD is required to notify affected officers about why their promotions are withheld, delayed or removed. The NDAA should be amended to directly address this deficiency.

Specifically, I recommend that this legislative addition require at least the following information be provided in writing to the servicemember:

1) A detailed justification and basis for the decision;

2) The officer's sequence number out of the officers selected in the officer's given category;

3) A redacted copy of the Promotion Selection Board Results listing the officer's name; and

4) Confirmation that the relevant Promotion Selection Board followed all relevant statutes, U.S. Department of Defense policies and the Service's policies.

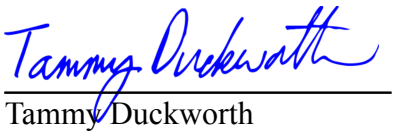
In addition, I request inclusion of a requirement that DoD establish a process whereby the Board for Correction of Military Records, under Chapter 79 of Title 10, expeditiously consider requests to adjust any portion of a servicemember's record where the servicemember shows harm or injustice as a result of having been selected for promotion but withheld for reasons other than substantiated or alleged misconduct.

Finally, these statutory requirements must apply retroactively to January 20, 2025, to ensure adequate due process to all officers.

Senior military officers, who have risked life and limb over decades of service, deserve transparency when the President, the Secretary of Defense or Service Secretaries decide to unilaterally remove, delay or withhold them from the promotion list and cap their careers at O-6 or O-7.

We owe our heroes and their families at least that much for their sacrifice.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator