



The Coalition to Save our Military Shopping Benefits

June 12, 2015

The Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
Senate Military Family Caucus
458 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet,

The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits represents millions of active duty service members, National Guard and Reserve, retirees, veterans, military families, survivors, and persons with disabilities. As a member of the Senate Military Family Caucus, we are counting on your leadership to help roll back multiple attacks on the commissary benefit proposed by the Pentagon and passed by the Senate Armed Services Committee in the Committee's version of the FY16 National Defense Authorization Act.

- We strongly urge your support of the Inhofe-Mikulski amendment (#1728) to S. 1376, *the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016*, requiring a report assessing the viability of privatizing the commissary system before implementing any changes.
- We strongly urge your support of the Mikulski amendment (#2009), to S. 1376 *the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016*, restoring the \$322 million in cuts from the commissary program.
- We strongly urge your support of the Mikulski amendment (#1886), to S. 1376 *the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016*, striking language allowing the Secretary of Defense to raise commissary prices at his discretion.

Privatizing commissaries to outside profit making grocery chains places military families' relied-upon savings at the whim of private industry and squanders billions of dollars worth of commissary stores that military families have paid for

out of their own pockets. Furthermore, we fear private industry will cherry-pick the larger military grocery stores and set the smaller ones adrift, disrupting the existing supply chain that anchors support for overseas and remote U.S. stores.

The Committee's version of the Defense Bill also sets in motion price increases and reduced operating hours, and would severely damage a benefit long cherished by millions of service members and their families who rely on the 30 percent savings commissaries provide. These cuts also occur without the benefit of a report requested by the Committee in the FY15 National Defense Authorization Act that has yet to be provided to Congress.

The Committee's privatization plan, devastating cuts, and price increases will dismantle the commissary benefit, relied upon by millions of military service members and their families, and will severely impact those who need it most—junior enlisted families, fixed income retirees, and surviving families. Military families rely on this benefit to stretch their household budgets and provide healthy food for the well being of their families. Further, diminished savings at commissaries also will reduce traffic at exchange operations and damage their ability to finance essential military community support programs.

Commissary and exchanges are a vital part of military pay and compensation. The military community greatly value and use these earned benefits. They consistently rank them as a top compensation benefit, yielding returns to patrons and the DoD that far outweigh taxpayer support. Moreover, service members and their families are partners with taxpayers, having financed billions of dollars in facilities and quality of life programs.

We recognize that all Defense programs must strive for efficiency and commissaries have done just that by reducing operating costs nearly 40 percent. Military resale programs also provide critical jobs for military families and veterans—over 60 percent of employees are military connected with nearly 30 percent of the workforce being military family members.

We greatly appreciate your leadership in support of military families, and we thank you for your continued efforts to protect these critical earned benefits—which are the benchmark for our nation's commitment to our service members and their families who sacrifice the most for our freedom.

Sincerely,

Member Organizations, The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits

Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)

National Military Family Association (NMFA)

Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)

The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)

Association of the United States Army (AUSA)

American Veterans (AMVETS)

United States Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA)

Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV)

Association of the United States Navy (AUSN)

Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)

Military Partners and Families Coalition (MPFC)

American Military Society (AMS)

National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS)

American Military Retirees Association (AMRA)

The American Military Partner Association (AMPA)

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivor (TAPS)

American Logistics Association (ALA)

Armed Forces Marketing Council (AFMC)