

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 31, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Secretary Esper,

We write to you to express concern regarding the ongoing turmoil within the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) and the stress it is placing on our service members. Our military families sacrifice the stability and prosperity that their service affords the American people, and current DoDEA policies place needless stress and uncertainty into already chaotic lives. We urge you to take the necessary steps to reverse these concerning policies, which place unnecessary stress on our military families.

Last year DoDEA implemented several policies that have harmed its ability to recruit and retain quality teachers with the unique professional and personal skills to serve the children of our service members and maintain the high standards that are found in DoDEA's schools. DoDEA's schools are staffed by teachers who understand the unique needs of children of deployed parents, often because they themselves have lived this experience as military spouses. The Department of Defense's decision to cut nearly 200 DoDEA teaching positions eliminated jobs often taken by military spouses and veterans and restricted course options for students.¹ While DoDEA may claim the cuts are due to small class sizes at some duty stations, the children of our service members should not be limited in the quality or availability of classes due to the demands of military service.

Additionally, DoDEA imposed 24 additional hours of unpaid duty time per quarter. This policy has caused significant problems for military families when the teachers are military spouses who must pay for additional childcare, reintegrate their children into already unpredictable daily routines, and contribute to the instability already faced by military families. These hours are ostensibly intended for professional development, but DoDEA teachers have reported to our offices that they have frequently been required to arrive early or stay late with no actual instruction or guidance. DoDEA teachers already spend an average of 17 hours per week outside of the classroom grading papers, lesson planning, and coordinating with their colleagues. The new required unpaid hours are an added burden to those already filling the difficult roles of teacher, military spouse, and parent. Recently an independent and mutually agreed to arbitrator ruled that DoDEA must discontinue the additional unpaid hours and must pay millions of dollars in back pay to DoDEA teachers. Continuing this

¹ *Military Times*, "Here's why DoD school officials cut 178 teaching positions, and eliminated small classes," Karen Jowers, September 2, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/2019/09/02/heres-why-dod-school-officials-cut-178-teaching-positions-and-eliminated-small-classes/>

unnecessary and prohibitive policy will not only continue to place an unnecessary burden on teachers and families, but may also result in the need to pay millions more.

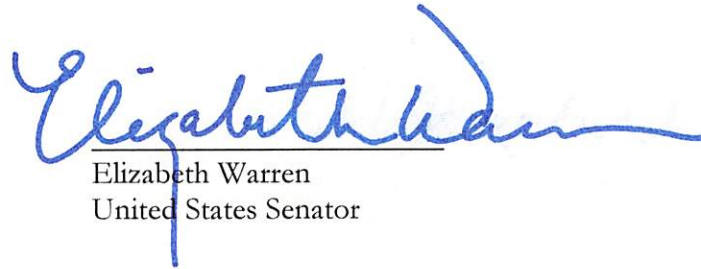
This needless instability and uncertainty is a major concern for our military readiness. The ability to recruit and retain personnel is often largely impacted by family considerations. It is troubling to think that any of the thousands of paratroopers who deployed recently in response to heightened tensions with Iran would need to worry about the ability of their spouses to get to work on time or whether after-school care would be available.

We hope you will take the necessary steps to reverse these unnecessary and troubling decisions and provide our military families with stability and provide the best possible education for their children.

Sincerely,



Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Jackie Speier
United States Representative



Brian Fitzpatrick
United States Representative




Gregory S. Murphy M.D.
United States Representative




Richard Hudson
United States Representative





Gilbert R. Cisneros Jr.
United States Representative

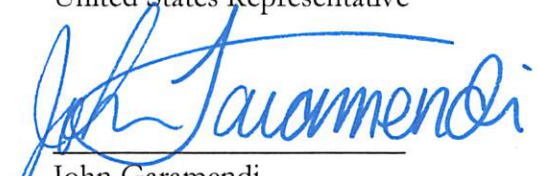

Anthony G. Brown
United States Representative


Deb Haaland
United States Representative


Jason Crow
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Sean Patrick Maloney
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Joe Courtney
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United States Representative


Salud O. Carbajal
United States Representative


George Holding
United States Representative

CC The Honorable Thomas M. Brady
Director
Department of Defense Education Activity