

June 6, 2024

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Wicker:

As the Senate Armed Services Committee begins work on its National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), the undersigned organizations, including civil and human rights organizations and those representing members of U.S. military families and veteran communities, write to express concerns about the possibility of Committee amendments that seek to restrict or eliminate Department of Defense (DoD) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) programs and initiatives.

You may recall that during congressional consideration of the FY 2024 NDAA, amendments were proposed that threatened the health and welfare of servicemembers and their families, and would have undermined the military's DEIA efforts, and harmed recruitment, retention, and force readiness. Thankfully, most of these amendments were not enacted into law – but several were, undermining strength and cohesion of our armed forces.

The [campaign against DEIA in the U.S. military](#) is part of a strategic effort to roll back civil and human rights in the United States. Some who advocate against DEIA spread misinformation to weaken support for these vital programs. Last year, the harmful provisions targeted minorities within the military, sought to restrict critical gender-affirming care for servicemembers and their families, targeted inclusive training and educational curricula in the DoD, and falsely suggested that content addressing diversity and equity promotes racism and discrimination.

We appreciate Congress' previous support for the military's DEIA initiatives to enhance equity, cohesion, and ensure force readiness. In 2020, [Congress mandated that the DoD establish a Chief Diversity Officer](#), establish Senior Advisors for DEI in each service, and [include diversity and inclusion data in the National Defense Strategy](#). Similarly, DoD leadership has repeatedly emphasized the importance of DEIA-related initiatives. In 2023, the Under Secretary for Military Personnel and Readiness, the Honorable Gilbert Cisneros, Jr., alongside the Assistant Secretaries for Manpower and Reserve Affairs for the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, [testified before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel](#) that DEI was a “force multiplier,” saying “With the Department’s priority mission to provide a combat-credible Force, we must prioritize a force that is lethal, resilient, and reflective of America’s diversity.”

Investment in DEIA initiatives remains critical to ensuring the strength and cohesion of the U.S. military. More than 40 percent of service members identify as minorities and, by [2027](#), the

majority of adults eligible for military service will be people of color. However, a [2021 survey of servicemembers and their families](#) documented that nearly a third of respondents who identified as racial or ethnic minorities stated discrimination concerns factored into their decision of whether to remain in the military. Furthermore, a 2020 survey revealed that [the majority of minority servicemembers have witnessed racism in the ranks](#). [Black and Latino servicemembers remain vastly under-represented in the officer corps](#), compared to their numbers in the force as a whole. LGBTQ+ servicemembers also report discrimination; one survey showed [over 80 percent had faced sexual harassment or assault](#) during their service. Lastly, it is well-documented that discrimination against minority servicemembers reverberates throughout the force, undermining [unit cohesion](#), [exacerbating extremist threats](#), [limiting recruitment and retention](#), and [damaging force readiness](#).

We urge Congress to support the DoD's essential work promoting the welfare of an increasingly diverse force by rejecting any effort to restrict or eliminate DEIA initiatives in the FY25 NDAA – and by restoring the DEIA programs limited in the FY 2024 NDAA. In addition, we urge you to oppose any provisions in the House FY 2025 NDAA and amendments that would target health and other benefits for minority servicemembers, their families, and veteran communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have questions, please contact Erin Wilson, Senior Director, Extremism and Human Rights wilsone@humanrightsfirst.org or Michael Lieberman, Senior Policy Counsel, Hate and Extremism, Michael.Lieberman@splcenter.org or Chris Purdy, Director, Veterans for American Ideals purdyc@humanrightsfirst.org.

Signed,

Veterans' and Military Families' Organizations

#AfghanEvac

CommonDefense.us

Minority Veterans of America

National Veterans Network

Secure Families Initiative

Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO

Vet Voice Foundation

Veteran Advocacy Project

Veterans for American Ideals

Civil and Human Rights Organizations

ADL (Anti-Defamation League)

American Association of University Women

American Atheists

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Family Voices NJ
Global Project Against Hate and Extremism
GLSEN
Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights First
Impact Fund
Interfaith Alliance
Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Latino Farmers and Ranchers International Inc.
Matthew Shepard Foundation
National Association of Social Workers
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Jewish Women
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Urban League
Not in Our Town
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
SPLC Action Fund
The Lamia Afghan Foundation
The Sikh Coalition
Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund (TLDEF)
Union for Reform Judaism
Western States Center

Appendix A: Harmful FINAL 2024 NDAA Provisions Re: DEIA

- 529B. LIMITATION ON ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION POSITIONS; HIRING FREEZE.
 - Prohibits the DoD from establishing new DEI positions or filling vacant positions.
- SEC. 529C. REQUIREMENT TO BASE MILITARY ACCESSIONS AND PROMOTIONS ON MERIT AND PERFORMANCE.
 - Prohibits recruitment, promotions, assignments, and other personnel actions from considering race or gender.
- C. 1101. DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PERSONNEL GRADE CAP.
 - Limits civilian DEI positions to a rate payable for GS-10. Any current employee whose annual pay exceeded that amount needed to be reassigned.
- SEC. 576. PROHIBITION ON USE OF FEDERAL FUNDS TO ENDORSE CRITICAL RACE THEORY.
 - Erroneously defines “critical race theory” to mean the theory that individuals, by virtue of race, ethnicity, color, or national origin, bear collective guilt and are inherently responsible for actions committed in the past by other individuals of such race, ethnicity, color, or national origin. It also prohibits anything under this definition from being included in training or education of military personnel.

Appendix B: Harmful House FY 2025 Provisions Re: DEIA

- SEC.523 Requires the SECDEF to ensure all personnel decisions regarding military accessions, promotions, and command selections be based on merit and demonstrated performance and without regard to race and other subjective criteria.
- SEC. 547 Requires that all admittees to the military service academies be selected on the basis of merit and on objective candidate scores.
- EB3 Prohibits DODEA from having any committees, panels, offices, or other organization with responsibility for matters relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- EB1 Requires DODEA to provide a report explaining the purpose and value of its plans to incorporate “social emotional learning” curriculum into DODEA schools.