



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

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July 15, 2020

Dear Senator:

As you take up the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the Coalition on Human Needs strongly urges your support for two amendments that would shift our nation's priorities away from excessive militarism and towards urgently needed investments to meet human needs: the Sanders-Markey amendment (#1788) to cut the Department of Defense budget by 10 percent and the Schatz-Murkowski-Harris-Paul amendment (#2252) to limit the transfer of military equipment to local law enforcement.

The [Coalition on Human Needs](http://www.chn.org) (CHN) is an alliance of 100 national organizations including faith groups, human service providers, labor, civil rights and expert policy groups, and other advocates concerned with meeting the needs of low-income and vulnerable people. We help to convene the SAVE for All Campaign (Strengthening America's Values and Economy for All), in which well over one thousand organizations nationwide have come together in support of four principles: protect and assist low-income people in federal budget decisions; invest in broadly shared economic growth and jobs; support increased revenues from fair sources; and make savings from wasteful expenditures, such as excessive Pentagon spending.

CHN welcomes the opportunity to support these two amendments because they both take important steps towards curbing excessive Pentagon spending so that the federal government can support what is really needed: to invest in jobs, health care, education and other initiatives to lift people out of poverty and strengthen their economic security.

We strongly support the Sanders-Markey amendment (#1788) because it would shift \$74 billion from Pentagon expenditures to a federal grant program to fund health care, housing, child care and educational opportunities for cities and towns experiencing a poverty rate of 25% or more. Department of Defense expenditures for salaries and health care for personnel would be exempted from reductions. This transfer of funds would be aimed at addressing immediate threats to our people's security: lack of affordable health care, housing, child care and jobs, as well as underfunded schools. These needs are longstanding in our poorest communities but they have grown far more urgent during the pandemic. The \$74 billion fund made possible by the Sanders-Markey will help to address threats to life and economic security harsh for all but experienced very disproportionately by race. Adjusted for age, Black Americans' COVID-19 [death rate](#) is 3.8 times as high as whites'; indigenous people's death rate is 3.2 times as high; the Latinx death rate is 2.5 times as high. According to the Census Bureau's [Household Pulse Survey](#), close to 6 in 10 Latinx and Black households have seen losses in earnings; for whites, it was 44 percent. About one in four Black and Latinx households were unable to pay their rent in May, placing them at imminent risk of eviction. Black and Latinx households with children report not having enough to eat in the past 7 days at twice the rate of white households. Continuing to fund ineffective and redundant weapons systems, non-competitive military contracts, and an expanded nuclear arsenal

makes us less safe, especially now that funds are urgently needed to protect our health and economic stability.

We also strongly urge you to vote yes on the Schatz-Murkowski-Harris-Paul amendment (#2252) to restrict the transfer of weapons of war from the Pentagon to law enforcement agencies through the current "1033" program. Such weapons and equipment have increased the militarized presence of local police departments. Instead of increasing public safety, the use of military rifles, armored vehicles, aircraft and other equipment has been found to make police violence more prevalent without increasing the safety of officers or reducing crime. This amendment would limit the transfer of military equipment such as armor-piercing firearms and ammunition, bayonets, grenade launchers, grenades and explosives, weaponized drones, and tear gas. Any equipment transferred from the U.S. military would be prohibited from use against peaceful demonstrations. Needed equipment could be purchased from the military (such as firearms with ammunition of .30 caliber or less, gas masks, and personal protective equipment). Having to provide budget justifications for such purchases would make law enforcement agencies more accountable to their communities for their approach to public safety. As Americans have witnessed militarized police from Ferguson, MO to the clashes of today, they have come to recognize the very destructive impact on communities of color and on the administration of justice nationwide. This bipartisan amendment takes an important step towards demilitarizing law enforcement.

These two amendments start to address both Pentagon excess and its spill-over into the communities of America. Senator Sanders provides an extremely timely quote from President (and former four-staff general) Dwight D. Eisenhower: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed." We cannot afford those continued thefts and urge your "yes" votes on amendments #1788 and #2522.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Weinstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Deborah Weinstein
Executive Director