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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

March 11, 2010

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ERIN C. CONATON, STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We were gratified to hear during the State of the Union message of the First Lady's efforts "to forge a national commitment to support military families." As she pointed out in January in her address to military wives, that national commitment is not only reflected in the \$8.8 billion you have requested for military family programs in your fiscal year 2011 defense budget, but also must be accompanied by the efforts of citizens and others outside the Department of Defense.

However, we believe that the process now underway for the 2010 Census will jeopardize the ability of states and local communities to help forge and fully participate in that national commitment. The problem arises in the way that the 2010 Census will count the 250,000 or more military personnel temporarily deployed overseas from the United States and its territories in support of contingency operations, or for other short-term missions. This is not a question of adding additional money to state and local programs, but rather an effort to ensure outdated rules do not inhibit the ability of states and local communities to support military families as a result of the loss of funds they would normally have been eligible for in other than census years. We believe the matter deserves your immediate attention and corrective action.

Under rules established in 1970, all military personnel stationed overseas will be counted among the totals of the state of their home of record – that is, the place from which they entered the military service, or re-enlisted in the service. If a home of record is not available in Department of Defense administrative records, then the service member will be counted in the state of his or her legal residence; and, if neither of the first two data elements is available, then the overseas service member will be counted in the state of the base of his or her last duty station. In most cases that means the base or location from which the service member deployed overseas.

These counting rules may have made sense in 1970 for the Vietnam-era military that was heavily composed of draftees. Such allocation rules do not make sense today for the all-volunteer

force that is heavily and frequently deployed, causing the military populations residing on those bases, the local areas around those bases, and states to be severely, but temporarily reduced. For example, in November 2009, the North Carolina population, concentrated largely around Camp Lejeune and Fort Bragg, shrank by nearly 28,000 service members temporarily deployed on contingency operations. No state or territory or local areas near a military base is exempt from such reductions.

Many federal and state assistance programs use formulas based on the decennial census or derivatives from the decennial census data. As a result, military overseas population data based on the home of record deprives the state and local areas, where those service members actually live most of the time, of potentially large sums of federal and state funding. Reduced funding means that those local communities and states will have a reduced ability to support the military populations with which they are inextricably linked. For example, a recent estimate of the impact in Onslow County, North Carolina, near Camp Lejeune, cited potential losses of up to \$4 million under current decennial census rules for counting military personnel stationed overseas.

Given the potential for similar significant financial impacts across the nation, we urge you to direct the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Defense, and the Director of the United States Census to take the necessary administrative actions to adopt for the 2010 and future decennial censuses the following method of counting our military men and women, who are temporarily deployed from the United States to overseas contingency missions, or other short term overseas assignments: Such persons must be counted, first in the state of their most recent base of stateside assignment; then, if such data is not available, by their legal residence; and, finally, by their home of record.

We understand that there are many issues related to residency and census counting. These can and should be examined over the long term. In the near term, the resolution of those issues should not be tied to the immediate need to address the ability of states and local communities to join the national commitment to support military families.

Therefore, we look forward to assisting you in measures to ensure there is no loss of federal or state and local resources to assist local communities in maintaining and improving military family quality of life. We thus anticipate your favorable commitment to the course of action we have proposed.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Ranking Member

Cc: Secretary of Defense
Secretary of Commerce
Director of the United States Census

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