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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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RANKING MEMBER, CONGRESSIONAL-
EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA

www.chrissmith.house.gov

December 5, 2022

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, Chairman Smith, and Ranking Member Rogers:

As you finalize negotiations for the *FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)*, I urge you to include language from my legislation, H.R. 7570, or other similar provisions, to ensure that servicemembers who have been separated from the Armed Forces solely on the basis of refusing the COVID-19 vaccination receive an “honorable discharge” should they remain separated from service.

As the former Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, and author of the *Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001*, it is my strong belief that our Nation’s veterans deserve the upmost respect for their service and heroic sacrifices in protection of freedom and democracy. H.R. 7570 was developed in response to contact from several constituents who were involuntarily separated from the military due to compulsory vaccine mandates and were advised they were at risk of losing benefits for receiving a “general discharge.” Congress must act to ensure those who have answered our Nation’s call to serve can receive the benefits they were promised and to which they are entitled.

The language included in H.R. 7570 improves upon language included in the FY 2022 NDAA and ensures those who have served faithfully can access their hard earned - and deserved - benefits. My bill includes a provision to upgrade a discharge characterized as “general” to “honorable” – any discharge short of honorable puts critical benefits, such as GI Bill education benefits, at risk. No one should lose their jobs or pensions because they do not want the COVID-19 vaccine, especially our courageous service members who step up to defend the very freedoms we enjoy.

Sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress