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February 2, 2016

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
Ranking Member
Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Gillibrand:

The Tricare for Kids Coalition, a stakeholder group of children's health care advocacy and professional organizations, disability advocacy groups, military and veterans' service organizations and military families, is committed to ensuring that the military health system meets the unique health needs of the more than two million children covered by Tricare. **As you prepare hearings on reforming the military health care system, the Tricare for Kids Coalition respectfully requests you consider a hearing focused on the unique health needs of children in military families and the challenges their families face in seeking that care.**

As you know, the Section 735 "Tricare for Kids" report required by the Fiscal Year 2013 National Defense Authorization Act (FY13 NDAA) was released in July 2014. The report identified gaps and potential problem areas in Tricare coverage, many of which were aligned with concerns raised by the Tricare for Kids Coalition, but did not include the congressionally required plan for next steps. Although our military-connected children are a significant, and in some ways particularly vulnerable, segment of the beneficiary population, their needs are not always reflected in Department of Defense (DoD) health policy decisions.

It has become increasingly evident from the myriad of studies, reports, surveys and anecdotes that any attempt at reforming the military health system that does not specifically address children's unique needs will fall woefully short of real reform.

The military health care system must affirmatively meet the unique health needs of Tricare-covered children and families, including children impacted by complex, chronic and special health conditions. This entails appropriate coverage, access to services and a system that is accountable to stakeholders. A “Tricare for Kids” focused hearing would provide Congress the opportunity to learn about the DoD’s plans to ensure that children’s needs are addressed appropriately, now and into the future. The inclusion of children’s health care experts and stakeholders on the panel would provide an opportunity to learn about the best practices and innovative solutions that have been identified as important to filling long-identified gaps in the system and meeting the unique health needs of children covered by Tricare.

In order to gain a full understanding of the issues, we would be happy to suggest a panel of representatives of the Tricare for Kids Coalition members, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children’s Hospital Association, the Military Officers Association of America and the National Military Family Association, among others.

A hearing on the unique needs of children in military families would provide the subcommittee with an opportunity to gather expertise from military beneficiaries, the DoD and other stakeholders to better inform the Tricare reform process. We believe a hearing focused on military children’s health care will help guide discussion toward pediatric best practices and innovative care models, and it would make meaningful steps toward ensuring effective, valuable and sustainable benefits tailored to the needs of our military children and their families.

Thank you so much for your consideration this request and your commitment to the health and wellbeing of our military-connected children and families.

Sincerely,

Tricare for Kids Coalition

American Academy of Pediatrics
Children’s Hospital Association
Commissioned Officers Association of the United States Public Health Service
Easter Seals
Family Voices
March of Dimes
Military Child Education Coalition
Military Family Advisory Network
Military Kids Matter
Military Officers Association of America
Military Special Needs Network
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children’s Behavioral Health
National Military Family Association

Cc: SASC Personnel Subcommittee