



PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

APR 18 2018

The Honorable William M. "Mac" Thornberry  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Section 533 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 and section 521 of the NDAA for FY 2018, amended sections 1552 and 1553 of title 10, to require the Boards for the Correction of Military/Naval Records and Discharge Review Boards to make certain information regarding mental health claims, sexual assault claims, applications related to war or contingency operation, and relief rates available through the internet on a quarterly basis. Enclosed is the requisite data for the fourth quarter of 2017 (October through December), as well as a copy of the data for the third quarter of 2017 (July through September), which has been revised to correct data entry errors. The data will be published on the Department's Joint Reading Room webpage by the end of April 2018.

New this quarter is a table reflecting cases that do not involve mental health conditions or sexual assault claims. This table provides a baseline that makes it possible to compare the rates of relief for the specified categories with the rates of relief for all other discharge cases.

For this reporting period, there were 273 applications for discharge review in which the relief was based, in whole or in part, on mental health conditions. Just over 40 percent of these veterans were granted relief that usually included an upgrade in discharge characterization. To be clear, not every veteran requests an upgrade and not every case so warrants. The vast majority of military separations are characterized as honorable. Accordingly, many veterans seek relief other than an upgrade, such as the opportunity to re-enlist, a change in the narrative reason listed for their separation, or a medical retirement instead of a separation.

Also during this reporting period, there were 40 veterans who sought discharge relief on the basis of having been the victim of sexual assault or harassment. Just over 32 percent of these veterans were granted relief. This represents a dip in the rate of relief compared to last quarter, due primarily to a string of cases in which the medical advisory opinion provided to the board, as required by section 1552 of title 10, concluded there was no supportable nexus between the asserted sexual assault and the basis for separation. The rate of relief for these cases is substantially higher than cases that do not receive liberal consideration, however. In any event, the overall number of cases in this category is still relatively small and best assessed in the aggregate over the course of the year.

We have a number of initiatives underway that we believe will favorably affect Board processing of these categories of cases and will continue to work with the Armed Services Committees to that end. Thank you for your continued support of our men and women in uniform and for our Nation's veterans.

A similar letter is being sent to the Chairman of the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephanie Barna". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Stephanie Barna  
Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of  
Defense for Personnel and Readiness

Enclosures:

As stated

cc:

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member