

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 19, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

In 2007 we were partners in the fight against the military's misuse of personality disorder discharges. Today, we urge you to renew your commitment to address this critical issue facing thousands of returning service members.

As you know, personality disorders are considered "pre-existing" conditions which disqualify military personnel for the receipt of service benefits. Additionally, these men and women may not be eligible for medical care from the Department of Veterans Affairs for these "pre-existing" illnesses. In many instances, service members discharged with "personality disorders" are forced to repay thousands of dollars to the federal government in re-enlistment bonuses they deserved while serving in hazardous combat conditions. This can result in debilitating debt among troops and their families—many of whom endured significant strain from frequent and protracted combat deployments.

As a result of our advocacy in Congress – including yours Mr. President – last October the Government Accountability Office (GAO) studied the files of 26,000 enlisted service members who were separated from the military because of a personality disorder from November 1, 2001 through June 30, 2007. Of those 26,000 individuals who were separated, nearly 2,800 had deployed at least once to Iraq or Afghanistan.

The GAO report is troubling, especially the findings which cite the Pentagon's failure to meet key personality disorder separation requirements. For instance, compliance with mandatory counseling requirements during member separation ranged from 40 to 99 percent by installation in the study. When GAO asked Pentagon officials about the low rates of compliance for some of the separation requirements, military officials could not explain why the personality discharge separations were approved if compliance with requirements was not documented in the service record.

According to the American Psychological Association, the only way to distinguish a personality disorder from combat-related PTSD is by getting an in-depth medical and personal history from the service member that is corroborated by family, friends and colleagues. GAO found that in a significant number of records, an incomplete diagnosis was made, or the medical diagnosis was not included.

Thankfully, since this troubling GAO study was released the Pentagon has implemented safeguards that employ rigorous steps in the personality disorder discharge process. However, given the devastating effects of these discharges, assurances are not entirely sufficient. As a

result of our continuing concern for the treatment of our combat troops, we ask for your Administration to update Congress on the current use of the personality disorder discharge process across the Armed Forces.

First, we ask for an updated number of service members who have deployed to a combat zone and were later discharged with personality disorders since the implementation of the new safeguards in June 2008. Second, we request the total number of appeal requests initiated by active and former service members discharged with a personality disorder since June 2008 for review through their respective Discharge Review Board. Finally, we ask that your Administration notify all combat veterans previously discharged for personality disorders and advise them of their rights and protections. This notification should include information on the processes and procedures to former service members who believe their discharges were incorrectly characterized or processes to request adjudication through their respective Military Department's Discharge Review Board.

The brave men and women who put their lives on the line to defend our nation and our freedom have earned a debt of gratitude from all Americans that we will never be able to pay in full. The very least we can do is ensure our courageous service men and women receive the care they deserve when they return home.

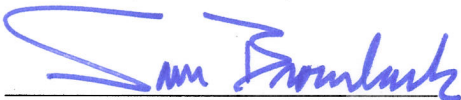
Sincerely,



Senator Christopher S. Bond



Senator Blanche L. Lincoln



Senator Sam Brownback



Senator Chuck Grassley