

October 18, 2017

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman, Armed Services Committee
228 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman, Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee
228 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen McCain and Thornberry and Ranking Members Reed and Smith:

We write today to express our objections to amendments added to the NDAA bill on the Senate floor that would harm vital defense health research programs specifically initiated to help US soldiers who sustain traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and spinal cord injuries (SCI).

Congress created the Peer-Reviewed Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Research Program in 2008 to address the crisis faced by tens of thousands of troops upon returning home from various Middle East deployments with spinal cord injuries. Many of these soldiers became paralyzed and/or brain injured when they experienced blast injuries and other types of casualties in the field, but there was no funding specifically dedicated for SCI research. The federally-funded SCI research program was created to address this disparity.

Every year congressional champions request \$30 million for the spinal cord injury research account in the annual appropriations process. The funding has helped push science the closest it has ever been to finding a cure for paralysis.

SCI research focuses on such areas as human clinical trials on cellular transplantation for restored sensation and function, deep brain stimulation, rehabilitation, as well as quality of life issues such as pain management and wheelchair and other adaptive technologies to help injured veterans. Scientists have also pioneered hypothermia cooling therapy, which is being used on the battlefield to improve outcomes and prevent paralysis when soldiers sustain blast injuries. These are among many new promising discoveries scientists, doctors and rehabilitation therapists are making every day to help improve the lives of veterans and other individuals with spinal cord injuries.

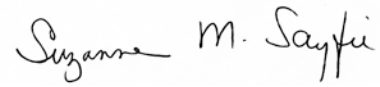
We hate to think of the important ground our scientists will lose if defense health funding for this important research goes away. In many cases, it's how we leverage funding from the private sector to help fund expensive clinical trials and therapies.

Please reject the Senate provisions in the NDAA conference that will harm important and irreplaceable defense health programs, like SCI research – a program that offers hope to the nation's wounded veterans.

Sincerely,



Marc Buoniconti
President
The Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis



Suzanne M. Sayfie
Executive Director
The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis



F. Todd Wetzel, M.D.
President
North American Spine Society



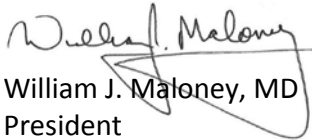
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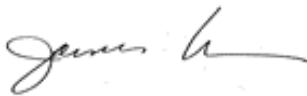
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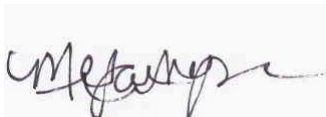
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