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United States Senate

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October 26, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper,

I write today to request financial relief for retired veterans subject to new health care enrollment fees under TRICARE Select health plans. As the Defense Health Agency (DHA) implements the new TRICARE Select enrollment fee, a 12-month grace period for impacted beneficiaries will ensure no former servicemember loses TRICARE coverage in this already uncertain and difficult time. This action is within your authority and in keeping with recent actions by the Department of Defense (DOD).

On January 1, 2021, the new, monthly enrollment fees for Group A retirees using TRICARE Select will go into effect and jeopardize the medical coverage of countless former servicemen and women, an issue that could be remedied through the implementation of a 12-month grace period. As you know, it is unlikely that Congress could move swiftly enough to provide relief before the change takes effect, based upon how little time is left in the legislative calendar. By contrast, there is ample time for DOD to take action, and it is within your authority to do so. Implementing a grace period to pay new TRICARE Select enrollment fees would also be in keeping with recent decisions by the Department. As potential harmful effects on access to care were uncovered, DOD paused the transition of beneficiaries away from military treatment facilities to private medical care, and similarly offered a 12-month grace period when the TRICARE annual enrollment requirement was established in 2018.

Past transitions suggest it is impossible to reach every beneficiary with updates about TRICARE benefits and requirements in a timely manner. Inevitably, some veterans and their families only learn about a new requirement when they try to access needed health care and find out they no longer have coverage. Even now, the official TRICARE website emphasizes that military retirees who want to stay in their current plan don't have to take any action, which may be confusing to those Group A retirees who must pay the new enrollment fee to maintain their TRICARE Select coverage.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented impacts on the health and economy of our nation. No military retiree or their loved ones should be at risk of losing their

health care coverage and not receiving the care they need in the midst of this pandemic. By implementing a 12-month grace period, the Department can ensure that all military retirees and their families have adequate time and notice to meet the new TRICARE Select requirements and maintain their health care coverage. Those who have selflessly served our nation deserve to have access to affordable, high-quality health care. I appreciate your attention to this proposal to alleviate a burden on our country's former servicemen and women, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jon Tester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Jon Tester
United States Senator