

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.

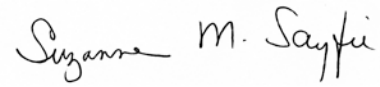
We hate to think of the important ground our scientists will lose if defense health funding for this important research goes away. In many cases, it's how we leverage funding from the private sector to help fund expensive clinical trials and therapies.

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



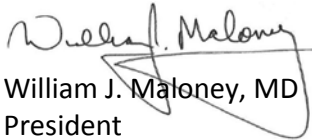
John G. Finkenberg, M.D.  
President  
National Association of Spine Specialists



Alex B. Valadka, M.D., FAANS  
President  
American Association of Neurological Surgeons



Ashwini D. Sharan, M.D., FAANS  
President  
Congress of Neurological Surgeons



William J. Maloney, MD  
President  
American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons



Carl Blake  
Associate Executive Director  
Government Relations  
Paralyzed Veterans of America



James Weisman, Esq.  
President and CEO, United Spinal Association  
VetsFirst, a program of United Spinal Association



Michael L. Jones, Ph.D., FACRM  
Vice President for Research and Technology  
Shepherd Center



Scott R. Whittemore, Ph.D.  
Henry D. and Marianna Garretson Professor, Vice Chair for Research  
Kentucky Spinal Cord Injury Research Center  
University of Louisville



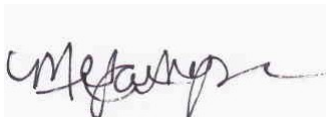
Trevor A. Dyson-Hudson, M.D.  
Director, Spinal Cord Injury Research  
Kessler Foundation



Yuying Chen, M.D., Ph.D.  
Professor and Director, National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center  
University of Alabama at Birmingham



Kym Eisner  
Executive Director  
Craig H. Neilsen Foundation



Megan Moynahan  
Executive Director, Institute for Functional Restoration  
Case Western Reserve University



Tim Brophy, MBA  
Executive Director  
Spine Foundation