

September 12, 2023

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Chairman, House Armed Services Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services  
Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member, House Armed Services  
Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Reed and Wicker, and Congressmen Rogers and Smith,

As Gold Star family members, survivors, and organizations dedicated to addressing Sudden Cardiac Arrest, we write to you to strongly express our support for Section 528 of the House passed Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This necessary section would establish a pilot program to provide electrocardiograms to individuals entering military service.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) is the leading cause of non-traumatic death in the military, and statistics show that about 1 in 300 youth, the target age for recruitment, has a condition that puts them at risk for SCA.<sup>i</sup> Servicemembers who have an underlying cardiac condition are at increased risk for a significant cardiac event, including SCA. In comparing military recruits with athletes, as both groups are in peak physical condition, servicemembers are seven times more likely to experience Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD).<sup>ii</sup> An unknown cardiac condition coupled with peak exertion and extreme environmental and mental stress is a proven deadly combination.

Military accession protocols do not currently include an electrocardiogram (ECG) that would find more than 85% of the conditions that can lead to SCA, even though some conditions are disqualifying for military service. ECGs are simple, inexpensive, and take less than 5 minutes, whereas a military death can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and have devastating consequences for military units and families, and possibly harm readiness.

As a result of improvements to ECG interpretation for athletes and the use of advanced algorithms in new technology, the reliability of this critical screening tool has increased with a false positive rate of under two percent.<sup>iii</sup> Congressionally mandated screening programs at the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy, and the Military Academy at West Point are excellent examples of how effective ECG screenings can be. Of 7,626 screened with ECGs at the service academies, 26 were found to have potential vulnerability to SCD, none of which were found by the typical medical evaluation – even when performed by a cardiologist. Fourteen of these individuals were able to serve after having their condition treated, nine are under surveillance while serving, and three individuals were medically separated with disqualifying cardiac conditions.<sup>iv</sup> ECG screening appears to be the most effective way to find silent heart conditions that can cause SCA. Without it, current cardiac screening protocols for those entering military service are inadequate.

Vice Admiral Sean Buck, former Superintendent of the US Naval Academy, has stated, "I would rather have the conversation with those who are being medically separated than with the parents of those who died." All recruits deserve to be heart safe. We fully endorse Section 528, *Pilot Program on Cardiac Screenings for Military Accessions*, and urge its inclusion in any final NDAA conference outcome. We are grateful for your leadership and support of this legislation and appreciate your continued efforts to honor and strengthen our nation's military. We look forward to working with you to pass this important and life-saving legislation.

For further questions, please contact Laurie Finlayson at [laurie@lionheartheroes.org](mailto:laurie@lionheartheroes.org) or 425.351.1669 or Madison Arcangeli at [madison@forzadc.com](mailto:madison@forzadc.com) or 425.750.7355.

Respectfully,

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Gold Star Mother of LCpl David Finlayson, SCD

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SCD

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Abbreviations: SCA = Sudden Cardiac Arrest;  
SCD = Sudden Cardiac Death

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<sup>i</sup> Averaged from Fuller, 1997; Corrado, 2006; AHA 2007; Wilson, 2008; Bessem, 2009; Baggish, 2010; Harmon, 2015; Drezner, 2016

<sup>ii</sup> Franzos, M. Alaric, et al. *LEFT OF BANG: Electrocardiographic Screening of Cadets and Midshipmen at Service Academies*. Abstract for

poster presentation at Military Health System Research Symposium (MHSRS), 16 Aug. 2023.

<sup>iii</sup> Franzos, et al. *LEFT OF BANG*.

<sup>iv</sup> Franzos, et al. *LEFT OF BANG*.