

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 12, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
SD-122 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Vice Chairman
Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
SD-122 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairman Durbin:

We strongly urge you to support continued funding to research opioid-alternative or non-addictive methods to treat and manage chronic pain in the Peer-Reviewed Chronic Pain Management Research Program within the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program.

The Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program drives innovation in the medical community and finds solutions for medical challenges facing our servicemembers. The continuation of this research that focuses on chronic pain management and treatment caused by service-related injuries and stress can lead to the development of treatment therapies to prevent dependence on opioids and other addictive substances for the rest of the country.

Servicemembers and veterans suffer from chronic pain that can be attributed to a multitude of factors, both combat-related and stress-related as a result their service to our country. Servicemembers and veterans have used prescription opioids for such ailments such as traumatic brain injury, headaches, osteoarthritis, back pain, diabetic neuropathy, and cancer. Post-traumatic stress related to severe chronic pain in veterans can increase risks of disability, psychological stress, and even suicide. These risks make it paramount that we find better ways to manage and treat chronic pain.

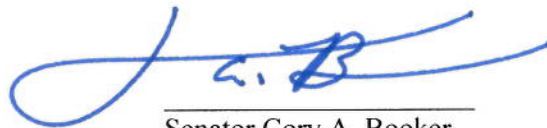
With few options outside of prescription opioids, members of our military can be reliant on highly addictive substances, such as opioids, to manage this pain. In 2016, the Department of Veteran Affairs released a study that shows veterans who receive the highest doses of opioid painkillers are twice as likely to die by suicide as those who receive lower doses. Over the past 12 years, we have seen the increase in prescriptions for opioids among veterans increase by over 270 percent, which shows the growing use of these highly addictive substances. The risks of servicemembers and veterans becoming addicted to opioids are both a combat readiness challenge and a significant challenge for family and communities that rely on and support them while serving and after.

As you prepare the FY2020 Defense Appropriations Subcommittee appropriations bill, we ask that you provide \$10 million to fund necessary research on opioid-alternatives to treat and manage chronic pain for our servicemembers and veterans.

Sincerely,



Senator Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Senator Cory A. Booker
United States Senator