

The Honorable Pete Visclosky
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Visclosky and Ranking Member Calvert:

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) Department of Defense (DoD) Appropriations bill, we respectfully request food allergies be added to the list of conditions to be eligible for research under the Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program (PRMRP). The PRMRP is a valuable program within DoD, offering creative, long-term insights into significant medical issues like food allergies that affect members of the armed services and their families and do not always receive the investments they require in the private sector.

A study recently published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association Network Open* found a far higher prevalence of food allergies among American adults than previously revealed: about 10.8 percent – or 26 million adults – reported having a convincing food allergy. According to Food Allergy and Research Education (FARE), another 5.9 million children under the age of 18 suffer from at least one food allergy. That is one in 13 children or roughly two in every classroom. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports the prevalence of food allergies in children increased by 50 percent between 1997 and 2011. Between 1997 and 2008, the prevalence of peanut or tree nut allergy appears to have more than tripled in U.S. children.

Left untreated, allergic reactions to food can have deadly consequences. About 40 percent of children with food allergies have experienced a severe reaction, such as anaphylaxis. Each year, more than 200,000 Americans require emergency medical care for allergic reactions to food. That is equivalent to one trip to the emergency room every three minutes.

TRICARE faces the rising cost of care and support for military families dealing with food allergies. [According to DoD](#), TRICARE provides coverage to almost 9.4 million beneficiaries around the world, almost four million of which are family of service members. Applying the rate of food allergy prevalence in the general population to family members, alone, estimates over 400,000 beneficiaries afflicted with food allergies.

Further, a diagnosis of food allergy adversely affects one's ability to join or remain in the military. Although individuals with food allergies may apply for military service, each service branch has its own regulations to assess the applicant's food allergy history. [The Army has recently reported](#) struggles with recruitment, with more than two-thirds of young adults not qualifying for military service due to poor physical fitness or other issues. Readiness is vital to our national security, so it is crucial we support research on treating and curing this condition so as to minimize the proportion of the public that may be discouraged or disqualified from service due to food allergies.

DoD study of food allergies is not a new idea. In [FY09](#), the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) established the Genetic Studies of Food Allergy Research Program ([GSFARP](#)) with a \$2.5 million appropriation "to provide support for scientifically meritorious genetic research focused on

food allergies.” In FY¹⁰, the appropriation was \$1.875 million. Specific line item funding ended In FY11, but for FY12 and FY16, food allergies were eligible for research under the PRMRP.

Renewed investment in food allergy research through the PRMRP has the potential to make serious strides towards understanding the causes of, and developing treatments for, this widespread and under-researched condition. The sharp increase in prevalence over the past two decades is a disturbing trend that needs further investigation.

We respectfully ask your support for re-establishing food allergies as eligible for research funding through the PRMRP. Food allergy research has the potential to benefit military service members and their families and to vastly improve the state of food allergy research in this country for all who are, or who will be, diagnosed with this condition.

Sincerely,

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

David P. Roe, M.D.
Member of Congress