

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 5, 2016

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary
United States Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

General Joseph F. Dunford
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff
9999 Joint Staff Pentagon
Washington, DC 20318

Dear Secretary Carter and Chairman Dunford,

After years of mounting evidence, our nation is finally beginning to deal with the frightening truth when it comes to Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Unfortunately, the Department of Defense has not taken adequate steps to protect the men and women of the military when it comes to the devastating impacts of TBI.

From the National Football League to the men and women serving on the battlefield, the data is now clear: trauma from concussions and blast overpressure exposure harms the brain with long-lasting and severe effects. For military personnel, exposure to blast overpressure is the leading cause of mild TBI, the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Brain science research points to a clear relationship between Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and even non-concussive blast overpressure events caused by activities such as heavy weapons training.

In recognizing the importance of blast overpressure exposure to the well-being of its personnel, the Department developed and purchased technology to detect and collect overpressure data. These devices monitor individual blast exposure facilitating rapid response from medical staff while allowing data to be downloaded and analyzed. To my great surprise and disappointment, these critical devices are not being sent with units deploying to support global operations, nor are they being used in the training environment where the prevalence of blast exposure is very high. In fact, I have been informed that thousands of these life-saving devices may be headed into storage at a time when they are needed more than ever.

In order to live up to the commitment our nation has made to all those who serve, the Department must rapidly establish a Program of Record to collect and analyze blast overpressure data in both the operations and training environments.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress