



Duckworth, Blackburn Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Support Military Families Struggling with Hunger

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator and combat Veteran Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), who served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years and is Chair of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Airland Subcommittee, and U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) introduced bipartisan legislation to support active military families experiencing food insecurity and help ensure no one willing to serve this nation in uniform struggles to feed their families. Duckworth’s *Military Hunger Prevention Act*

would create a basic needs allowance to help low-income military families put food on the table. Companion legislation was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by U.S. Representatives Jimmy Panetta (D-CA-20) and Don Young (R-AK-AL).

“Far too many of our military families are experiencing hunger because of unintended barriers that make them unable to access essential nutrition assistance programs,” Duckworth said. “As someone whose family relied on these nutrition programs after my father lost his job, and who served in the uniform for most of my adult life, I’m proud to be working across the aisle with Senator Blackburn on this bill to help make sure our servicemembers and their families have enough to eat.”

"Members of our armed services and their families make tremendous sacrifices for our nation," said Blackburn. "The Military Hunger Prevention Act of 2021 I am co-leading with Senator Duckworth reflects our bi-partisan commitment to military families and sustained effort to address food insecurity. Barriers that prevent our lower-income earning troops and their families from accessing normal food sources like the local grocery store is something that Senator Duckworth and I have been working on together since last summer. We will keep fighting for our service members and their families as long as it takes. The last thing our servicemen and women should be concerned with is putting food on the table for their loved ones."

The legislation is also co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Patty Murray (D-WA), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Mark Warner (D-VA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Kevin Cramer (R-ND).

When the military is unable to provide servicemembers with housing wherever they are stationed, servicemembers receive a Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to pay for off-base or privatized military housing. Because of how the qualification calculations for federal food assistance programs like SNAP currently work, many low-income servicemembers can be excluded from receiving food assistance benefits if they receive BAH funding. The current flaw in federal law often forces military families to rely on food pantries and food banks for emergency food assistance. The basic needs allowance created by the *Military Hunger Prevention Act* would help correct for this flaw.

In June of last year, Duckworth and Blackburn [sent](#) a bipartisan letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue requesting that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) take swift action to cease considering monthly Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) as earned income when determining a military household’s eligibility for USDA

nutrition programs. Duckworth also [sent](#) a letter to the Biden Administration in March of this year urging it to develop concrete steps to tackle the alarming rate of food insecurity many military families currently face.

“Currently, there are federal regulations that unintentionally cause military families to lose out on SNAP benefits,” said Panetta. “Our bipartisan Military Hunger Prevention Act would make up for that loss by providing certain military households with a basic needs allowance to purchase groceries. Although it’s unfortunate that some military families have to resort to SNAP, it’s our responsibility to ensure that those families, at the least, have access to the necessary support they need to lead healthy, food secure lives.”

"Our nation's servicemembers are willing to fight and die for our country, and we should be doing all that we can to ensure that our heroes and their families do not go to bed hungry," said Young. "Every year, we spend billions to make sure that our nation's servicemembers are trained and equipped to defend our country. But all too often, we forget about their very real needs at home. No family, and certainly no child, should go hungry. Sadly, that is a reality for too many military families in Alaska and across the nation. I am very proud to have introduced the Military Hunger Prevention Act in the House, and I thank Senator Duckworth for leading the effort in the Senate. Our bill takes necessary steps to tackle hunger by implementing a Basic Needs Allowance for low-income servicemembers and their families. This legislation also benefits food pantries – which operate on nearly every military base – by reducing demand for goods and produce which already may be in low supply. This is a very good bill, and it comes at a crucial time. The COVID-19 pandemic has shined a light on the issue of food insecurity; we must stand up for those who defend us. Hunger is not a partisan issue, and I call on my friends on both sides of the aisle to join us in this urgently needed legislation."

“Even one military family facing food insecurity is unacceptable,” said Abby J. Leibman, President & CEO of MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. “We know that military hunger has gotten worse over the past year, but we also know that this problem predates COVID-19. For many years, military families have been quietly seeking assistance from food pantries and that operate on or near every military base in this country. We welcome reintroduction of the Military Hunger Prevention Act as an important step in ensuring that military families can meet their most basic needs, including enough food on the table. We hope Congress will pass this bill as quickly as possible, and we look forward to working with the Biden-Harris administration to address the structural problems that allow hunger to persist in this country.”

“Long before the pandemic, military families struggled to put food on the table. From frequent moves to high rates of military spouse unemployment, the unique challenges of

military life left too many families with empty cupboards and empty stomachs. In the last year, those problems have only gotten worse. The National Military Family Association (NMFA) is proud to support the bicameral *Military Hunger Prevention Act*, which will establish a targeted military family basic needs allowance and ensure our troops are able to feed their families. We are grateful to Senators Duckworth, Baldwin, Blackburn, Blumenthal, Durbin, Feinstein, Rosen, Murray, Luján, Klobuchar and Cortez Masto for their strong, bipartisan commitment that no military family should go hungry.” Besa Pinchotti, Acting Executive Director, National Military Family Association.

"In our 2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, 14% of enlisted active-duty family respondents (across all ranks) reported low or very low food security in the previous year. This is an unacceptable reality that has dire implications for mission readiness. Service members preoccupied with financial and food security concerns are less able to focus on their mission. Blue Star Families therefore supports Sen. Duckworth's efforts to establish a basic needs allowance for low-income service members." Kathy Roth-Douquet, CEO & Co-Founder, Blue Star Families.