

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 29, 2010

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Gates,

Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to meet with us today regarding child custody rights for our men and women in uniform. We appreciate your acknowledgement that service members have faced family law courts which have used deployment or even the possibility of deployment against the service member in custody cases. We also appreciate your commitment to take a fresh look at this issue.

As we discussed in our meeting, we are concerned that many states do not provide any protection to service members, and those that do provide inconsistent standards for service members who find themselves fighting to retain custody of their children upon return from deployment. Attached is a chart from the Congressional Research Service which shows the vast degree to which these state laws vary. This chart reinforces our position that we need a national baseline standard which protects service members upon their return from deployment and also allays their unrest about deployment or the possibility of deployment being used against them in child custody cases.

We are confident that we can work with the Department of Defense on a solution to this matter that will protect our men and women in uniform, as well as their families. Your staff may contact Joe Heaton with Rep. Turner at 202-225-6465 or Eric Bursch with Rep. Herseth-Sandlin at 202-225-2801 if we can provide any additional assistance.

Sincerely,



Michael R. Turner
Member of Congress



Stephanie Herseth Sandlin
Member of Congress