



## Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

Gerard M. Farrell  
Captain U.S. Navy (Ret)  
Executive Director

12 May 2011

The Honorable Robert M. Gates, Ph.D.  
Secretary of Defense  
The Pentagon  
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Gates:

On behalf of the 6500 officers of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, the Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service (COA) respectfully requests that you provide the authorization required by Public Law 111-377, the *Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010*, that will permit PHS officers to transfer Post 9/11 GI Bill educational benefits to eligible family members. This Association further requests that the officers of the NOAA Commissioned Corps also be included in the authorization as provided for in the law.

P.L. 111-377 corrected an oversight in the original Post 9/11 GI Bill that inadvertently excluded the PHS and NOAA Corps, the two smallest of the seven Uniformed Services, from the transferability provisions of the law. Section 110 of P.L. 111-377 amends Section 3319 of the Post 9/11 GI Bill to include the PHS and NOAA Corps in the transfer authority. The language in P.L. 111-377 notes that the purpose of the authority (to transfer the educational benefit) “is to promote recruitment and retention in the uniformed services.” The text goes on to say that “The Secretary concerned may exercise the authority for that purpose when authorized by the Secretary of Defense in the national security interests of the United States.” [Emphasis added.]

Protecting the nation’s public health is an indisputable and fundamental component of national security. The 2010 National Security Strategy addresses the importance of promoting global public health as key tool of “soft power.” PHS officers contribute to national security on a routine and daily manner. They serve throughout the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security as well as all other agencies of the federal government. PHS officers are deployed today in Iraq and Afghanistan and more than 140 other countries around the world. There is a well-documented shortage of public health professionals throughout the federal government, including within DoD where PHS officers are actively recruited to fill key positions. Retention of these highly qualified professionals is a high priority issue as is recruitment to sustain the force.

Similarly, the NOAA Corps is an integral component of United States national security providing critical charting, weather, aeronautical and oceanographic research upon which military operations routinely rely.

To ensure these highly valued uniformed service officers are able to exercise this vitally needed retention enhancement when the law takes effect on 1 August 2011, we urge you to provide the requisite national security finding to the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Commerce without delay.

Enclosed please find a draft memorandum to this purpose for your consideration. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your service to the country in these extraordinary times.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Farrell", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gerard M. Farrell  
Captain, U. S. Navy (Ret.)  
Executive Director

Enclosure

Copy to:

Secretary Sebelius

Secretary Locke

ADM Mullen

ASD/HA Dr. Woodson

ASH Dr. Koh

RADM Hunter

Surgeon General Benjamin

RADM Bailey

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

From: Secretary of Defense

Subj: TRANSFER AUTHORITY OF POST 9/11 GI BILL EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS FOR  
MEMBERS OF THE PHS AND NOAA COMMISSIONED CORPS

Ref: (a) P.L. 111-377

1. As required by Section 110 of P.L. 111-377, I hereby certify that the transfer authority for unused education benefits provided by the Post 9/11 GI Bill and accrued by Commissioned Corps officers of the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is in the national security interests of the United States. PHS and NOAA officers are integral to the defense of U.S. interests around the world and serve proudly and effectively alongside their fellow uniformed service members in a variety of essential national security tasks. They should be afforded full access to this important and well-deserved retention enhancement.

Robert M. Gates

Copy to: Secretary Shinseki