



August 15, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Greg Walden
Energy and Commerce Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Energy and Commerce Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Walden, and Ranking Member Pallone:

ASHP (American Society of Health-System Pharmacists) opposes the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) proposal to reduce the size of the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service from 6,500 officers to 4,000 officers. This proposal, contained in the recently released “Delivering Government Solutions in the 21st Century: Reform Plan and Reorganization Recommendations,” would result in a nearly 40 percent reduction in Commissioned Corps size at a time when demand for Corps officers is increasing. These officers are routinely deployed to address public health crises ranging from hurricanes and other natural disasters to disease outbreaks (e.g., Ebola), school shootings, and other similar situations. Unlike civilians, the Commissioned Corps are a readily deployable federal force that is critical to our national security and public health.

ASHP represents pharmacists, including many in the Commissioned Corps, who serve as patient care providers in acute and ambulatory settings. The organization’s 45,000 members include pharmacists, student pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians. For more than 75 years, ASHP has been at the forefront of efforts to improve medication use and enhance patient safety. ASHP has a longstanding history of support for the U.S. Public Health Service, which includes over 400 pharmacists working at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). ASHP works with these officers daily on such critical issues as drug shortages and drug supply chain security. Under the OMB proposal, assuming the cuts are equal across all branches of government, the number of these officers at the FDA would be reduced by at least 160 pharmacists.

We struggle to understand the justification for this 2,500-officer reduction. The only source of data in the proposal is an outdated and inaccurate Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that was rejected by the Department of Health and Human Services when it was issued more than 20 years ago.

Furthermore, the proposal does not take into account the overtime hours for which Corps officers are not compensated. At a time when federal budgets are stretched thin, employing the Corps — not reducing its ranks — should be the focus of the federal government.

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ASHP remains supportive of the Public Health Service; we believe it is a critical component for drug safety, security, and public health. We urge Congress to reject the OMB proposal and oppose any efforts to reduce the strength of the Commissioned Corps. Please contact me with any questions, or have a member of your team contact Christopher Topoleski, Director of Federal Legislative Affairs, at 301-664-8806 or at ctopoleski@ashp.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kasey K. Thompson', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Kasey K. Thompson, Pharm.D., M.S., M.B.A.
Chief Operating Officer and Senior Vice President