April 11, 2019

Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
Russell Senate Building, SR-228
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
Russell Senate Office Building, SR-228
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Dear Chairman Inhofe and Ranking Member Reed:

We join together as twelve Safe Kids Worldwide coalitions from throughout the U.S. to express our deep concern about the state of military housing and, specifically, the risks that such dangerous housing pose to children. By resolving these issues, we can prevent the injuries and health consequences currently stemming from this severely deficient housing. We thank the Committee for its bipartisan effort to consider these issues at the hearing on February 13, 2019.

We owe a great deal to the men and women who serve in uniform. They make tremendous sacrifices. Among them is the challenge of moving their family and spending long lapses of time when they are not around to share the parenting role. If a woman or man in uniform is deployed to a perilous part of the world, one thing they should not have to worry about are the living conditions of their spouse and children.

But they do.

• The Beckstrom family and their three children lived in privatized housing at Fort Bragg, NC. Their unit was flooded with untreated sewer water and toxic substances remained in the home. All three children sustained medical conditions because of their exposure to environmental hazards in the home.1
• At Fort Benning, Cale Brown settled his family at the Villages of Benning. He was an Army Colonel who served two tours of duty in Afghanistan and earned two Bronze Stars. The Browns’ son, John Jr., started to experience troubling symptoms at 18-months-old. He would wake up screaming, refused food, forgot most of the words he had learned and did not respond to his name. What was wrong was a mystery, until testing of the home revealed over 100 spots in the home with lead paint, some peeling and crumbling.2
• Josh and Lacy Saindon, and their three kids ranging from age 2 to 7, lived in military housing at Ft. Meade, Maryland for more than two years. Their Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) paid the private developer $2,200 each month. There were failing appliances, warped siding, and mold growing on the floor and walls of the kids’ bedroom. Kids sustained ear infections, sinus infections and colds.3

Over 100,000 children under age five live in military housing.4 At the February 13 hearing, the Military Family Advisory Network cited further housing problems based on a survey it conducted of over 16,000 respondents living in military housing currently or within the last three years. These issues included rats, bats, roaches, termites, non-functional HVAC systems and contaminated water.5 At Fort Meade housing, a ceiling collapsed on the bed in a child’s bedroom.6 Worse yet, because of the way military housing is funded, families could not exercise the basic right most tenants have: withholding of rent.

There are other child safety essentials involving military housing. Safe Kids coalitions weighed in on the need for military housing to be equipped with window guards. This was in response to the death of Evan English, 4 and ½ years old, who fell out of a second-floor window after the screen gave way at his family’s home on the
Aliamanu Military Reservation in Hawaii. Safe Kids has outlined other cost-effective measures to keep kids safer in military housing, including fire sprinkler systems in new housing, long-lasting carbon monoxide/smoke detectors and anti-scald devices to maintain safe water heater temperatures.

Safe Kids is dedicated to preventing injury involving children 19 and under, from car crashes to serious injuries in the home. We are a network of 417 coalitions throughout the United States, located at children’s hospitals, health departments and police and fire stations. We join together urging you to use your oversight authority to ensure that the men and women who make us safe around the world can raise their families in safe and healthy homes.

Sincerely,

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