



Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)

Problem:

Uniformed servicemembers dedicate their lives to serve and protect the United States. The United States Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps (CC), one of the eight uniformed services, is the only uniformed service with an exclusive focus on protecting our Nation's public health. These servicemembers work on the frontlines, both in the United States and abroad, responding to public health emergencies, such as Ebola, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite a rich history dating back to 1798, the PHSCC did not have an operational ready reserve component or public health emergency response strike team until the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* was signed into law in 2020. This was part of a larger modernization effort to ensure the U.S. would be ready to handle any future disease outbreaks. The initial authorization left gaps in personnel policy and benefits for the PHSCC Ready Reserve Corps (RRC) relative to other branches' Reserve Components. Officers in the PHSCC Ready Reserve deserve the same support provided to all other Reserve Component servicemembers. Providing parity of rights, benefits, and privileges for the PHSCC RRC ensures our Nation's response capabilities to regional, national and global public health emergencies as well as emerging public health threats.

Solution:

Senator Duckworth's *Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act* would empower the U.S Secretary of Health and Human Services to recruit, retain and mobilize an elite sustainment force of Public Health Service officers in response to public health emergencies. Specifically, it would:

- Codify the structure of the RRC in statute, enabling access to benefits and entitlements afforded to Reserve Component servicemembers of all other uniformed services;
- Authorize the PHSCC RRC to have the same dual compensation and leave rights as those of the Armed Forces so all citizens, whether their primary job is working in the private sector or for the Federal government, can go on military leave with pay;
- Extends Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill educational benefits to PHSCC RRC once they meet time-in-service requirements;
- Expand the Reserve Forces Policy Board to include representation of PHSCC; and
- Authorize funding to allow for sustainment, recruitment and retention of officers for the PHSCC RRC.