



June 12, 2019

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the managers and supervisors currently serving our nation in the federal government and whose interests are represented by the Federal Managers Association (FMA), I write to express our strong objection to Section 1102 of the Subcommittee on Readiness Mark for the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020, changing the length of the probationary period at the Department of Defense (DOD).

In 2015, Congress granted DOD a two-year probationary period as part of the FY2016 NDAA (P.L. 114-92). At the time, DOD explained¹ the reason for the extension was “one year often does not allow sufficient time for a supervisor to form conclusions regarding the performance of a new employee.” It cited examples that a new hire “spends much of the first year in training before beginning work,” and “don’t have an opportunity to demonstrate all the skills associated with their positions.” Further, DOD noted “the longer probationary period offers employees a greater opportunity to showcase their talents and for supervisors to properly assess their capabilities.”

FMA concurs with this assessment. Probation is a time to evaluate the employee or manager and determine whether they are suited, not just for the initial position, but also for federal service. Some career fields are so complex that it takes more than one year to properly train an entry-level employee. DOD’s current two-year probationary period benefits both the government and employees by allowing supervisors to make decisions based on the employees’ performance as fully trained employees – not just guessing at how they will perform after the training is completed. Many occupations within DOD, including nuclear welding, as one example, require highly specialized, technical skills to carry out their duties. New employees must often master broad and complex policies and procedures to meet their agencies’ missions, necessitating several months of formal training followed by long periods of on-the-job instruction.

¹ <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/961606/dod-announces-new-hire-probationary-period/>

Representative Gerry Connolly (D-VA) referenced DOD's two-year probationary period at an Oversight and Government Reform hearing in November 2017. He stated extending the probationary period "may be a good idea," but called on Congress to require the Government Accountability Office to "conduct a comprehensive study on DOD's extended probationary period to "see if impacts are good, bad, or indifferent." He stated, "I would like to see the evidence of whether two years is materially different." FMA agrees with the need for an evidence-based assessment to determine the efficacy, benefits, and challenges of DOD's current policy. It would be reckless and hasty to repeal Congress' own earlier action in the FY2016 NDAA, absent conclusive evidence of its actual impact.

For these reasons, we urge the House Armed Services Committee to reject Section 1102 of the Subcommittee on Readiness Mark. Thank you for considering FMA's views. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact FMA's Government Affairs Director Greg Stanford at or (703) 683-8700.

Sincerely,



Renee M. Johnson
National President

CC: Members of the House Armed Services Committee