

Position: The Reserve Organization of America urges Congress to support S.2297, the *Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act*.

Background: Despite a rich history dating back to 1798, the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps *did not* have a functional Ready Reserve Corps until the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security* (CARES) Act was signed into law in 2020.

Endorsed by twelve former and acting U.S. surgeon generals, the USPHS Ready Reserve Corps is part of a larger modernization effort to ensure total force readiness and public health preparedness. However, authorization gaps in personnel policy and benefits have prevented the USPHS Ready Reserve Corps from meeting desired recruiting, retention, and mobilization goals.

S.2297, the *Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act*, simply provides the USPHS Ready Reserve Corps with the following to rapidly respond to health and humanitarian needs and integrate further with the other uniformed services:

- A codified reserve component structure.
- Access to training exercises held by the other uniformed services.
- Access to medical and dental care under TRICARE Reserve Select, the TRICARE dental program, and TRICARE Retired Reserve.
- Access to dual compensation and military leave rights while deployed.
- Access to Post-9/11 and Montgomery GI Bill educational benefits.
- Representation on the Reserve Forces Policy Board, a federal advisory committee making recommendations directly to the Secretary of Defense to enhance reserve component readiness.
- \$13.6 million in authorized annual funding for programmatic sustainment.

Despite the gaps and a lack of funding, the USPHS Ready Reserve Corps has proven its effectiveness and potential by:

- Augmenting the National Guard Bureau's medical teams through delivering needed medical and public health expertise during times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Supporting the Operation Allies Welcome safe haven and resettlement missions to ensure evacuees received medical care.
- Providing medical care at the National Park Service Yosemite clinic to avoid complete clinic closure.
- Delivering no-cost healthcare to vulnerable populations through the Department of Defense's innovative readiness training missions.

To maximize the capabilities and readiness of the USPHS and its Ready Reserve Corps, ROA urges Congress to support **S.2297**, the *Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act*.

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