



P.O. Box 9867 | Fort Lauderdale, FL 33310
954.475.1200 | Toll-Free Fax 855.475.1201
Toll-Free Phone 855.475.1200
info@DebbiesDream.org
www.DebbiesDream.org

July 19, 2024

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S Senate
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. Senate
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Wicker:

On behalf of Debbie's Dream Foundation: Curing Stomach Cancer (DDF), I want to convey DDF's strong support of Section 748 of the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that calls for a report on a plan for *Helicobacter Pylori* (*H. pylori*) testing for certain members of the Armed Forces.

DDF is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness about stomach cancer, advancing funding for research, and providing education and support internationally to patients, families, and caregivers. DDF seeks as its ultimate goal to make the cure for stomach cancer a reality.

There is a high risk of *H. pylori* — a human carcinogen — among military service members. Undetected and untreated, *H. pylori* can lead to deadly or chronic conditions such as stomach cancer, ulcers and gastritis. Based on a recently published study,¹ one fourth of the U.S. veteran population is at risk for benign and malignant consequences of chronic *H. pylori* infection. However, studies show that when *H. pylori* is detected through testing and treated to eradication, the risk of gastric cancer drops significantly.^{2,3}

Research shows *H. pylori* may be present in individuals prior to enlistment or commissioning into the service, particularly among those who come from lower socioeconomic status or who are foreign born. Active duty individuals are at increased risk of contracting *H. pylori* especially if they are deployed outside the continental United States in areas in which *H. pylori* is highly prevalent, or who are subject to crowded living conditions. Given the considerable health and

¹ Shah SC, Halvorson AE, Lee D, Bustamante R, McBay B, et al. Helicobacter pylori Burden in the United States According to Individual Demographics and Geography: A Nationwide Analysis of the Veterans Healthcare System. Clin Gastroenterol Hepatol. 2024 Jan;22(1):42-50.e26. doi: 10.1016/j.cgh.2023.05.016. Epub 2023 May 26. PMID: 37245717.

² Kumar S, Metz DC, Ellenberg S, Kaplan DE, Goldberg DS. Risk Factors and Incidence of Gastric Cancer After Detection of Helicobacter pylori Infection: A Large Cohort Study. Gastroenterology. 2020 Feb;158(3):527-536.e7. doi: 10.1053/j.gastro.2019.10.019. Epub 2019 Oct 22. PMID: 31654635; PMCID: PMC7010558.

³ Li D, Jiang SF, Lei NY, Shah SC, Corley DA. Effect of Helicobacter pylori Eradication Therapy on the Incidence of Noncardia Gastric Adenocarcinoma in a Large Diverse Population in the United States. Gastroenterology. 2023 Aug;165(2):391-401.e2. doi: 10.1053/j.gastro.2023.04.026. Epub 2023 May 2. PMID: 37142201.



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cost of care burden associated with untreated *H. pylori*, as well as its potential impact on mission readiness, DDF strongly supports an *H. pylori* testing program for members of the Armed Forces, as well as processes and protocols for treating individuals who test positive *H. pylori*.

This year I had the opportunity to spend a day on Capitol Hill with Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman Jonathan Porter a stage 4 stomach cancer patient who is also active duty military. After presenting with symptoms of gastric reflux, he was eventually tested and diagnosed with *H. pylori*. He was treated with antibiotics, but never re-tested to ensure his *H. pylori* had been eradicated; it wasn't. Later he was diagnosed with an aggressive stomach cancer at an advanced stage. Ironically, he has spent 21+ years assigned to the military medical corps with immediate access to care, yet he still fell victim. Senior Chief Porter's stomach cancer could have been prevented with a simple screening test before he developed symptoms and standardized re-testing and treatment protocols.

We strongly support inclusion of Section 748 in the final FY2025 NDAA and hope that completion of a report on a plan for *H. pylori* testing will compel Congress to establish a permanent *H. pylori* screening program for members of the Armed Services. Should you have any questions or request access to research and clinician experts, please contact DDF policy advisor Camille Bonta at (202) 320-3658 or cbonta@summithealthconsulting.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrea".

Andrea Eidelman, Esq.
Chief Executive Officer