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Dear Senator Erin Murphy, Chair, State and Local Government and Veterans Committee:

I appreciate all you do for our great state of Minnesota and your leadership through the trying times of the past few years. I write to inform you of what I believe to be an injustice in the Post-9/11 Veteran Service Bonus. I also wrote to Governor Walz on this issue early in September of 2022.

I am an Iraq veteran of the Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) campaign, and I speak on behalf of the other OIR veterans who were in my unit and who share my concerns. While we are very appreciative of the Post-9/11 Veteran Service Bonus and believe it is admirable to give back to the veteran community, the law is not fair to us veterans who earned the Operation Inherent Resolve Campaign Medal because the top bracket of the law excludes us. Why does it do that? Our concern is not about the larger monetary award, but the lack of recognition for what we experienced serving in the Campaign and sacrificing our minds, bodies, and souls for our country and State. We served in combat within the qualifying window of time, yet the law denies us the same esteem as other soldiers and veterans, many of whom did not serve in combat and never had to experience the horrors of war and trauma.

The top tier includes those who earned an Iraq War Campaign Medal or the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) Expeditionary Medal. Yet several countries included in the GWOT Expeditionary Medal are not even classified as having “[combat zones](#)” (e.g., Philippines, Romania, Cuba, Hungary, etc.). The trauma, death, and horrors of war are still very real for me and for those who served with me, and there are many others who are still serving in Iraq and experiencing traumatic events.

I served in the Minnesota Army National Guard from 2016-2022 and deployed to Kuwait and Iraq from October 2019 - November 2020. To say our deployment was rough would be an understatement. I spent a few weeks in Kuwait, then spent the rest of my deployment in Iraq working outside of my normal duty role serving in a MEDEVAC section across Baghdad, Al-Taji, and a few other sites.

Our unit suffered from the [Iran-led attacks](#) against the Al-Asad airbase in January 2020, the attacks against the [Taji Forward Operating Base](#) in [March 2020](#), and dozens of other attacks and improvised explosive device ambushes over the following months. This resulted in the unfortunate deaths of several U.S. and NATO troops and the wounding of many more. My company was directly responsible for over 50 life-saving missions, several of which were deemed Category-A (urgent). Due to the nature of the conflict and the horrors of war we experienced daily, many of us, myself included, earned Combat Action Badges. I am thankful to have made it home unharmed physically, but my Soldiers and I will forever live with the scars of war as a direct result of what we went through.

Thank you, Senators, for all you do for our State and country.

Matthew Richie, combat veteran, Sgt., Operation Inherent Resolve, Minnesota Army National Guard