

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2016

The Honorable Robert O. Work
Deputy Secretary of Defense
1010 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1010

Dear Secretary Work,

We are writing to follow up on our previous communications over the past several months by phone, letter and in person regarding the Fort Jackson Running Shoe Program (FJRSP) and its progress in testing Berry-compliant shoe platforms.

Since the Defense Department issued the April 25, 2014 policy statement that committed to providing new recruits with 100 percent American-made athletic shoes, should they become available, we have raised many concerns with the seemingly deliberate delays in the implementation of this policy.

As you know, the 2014 policy letter states, “If one or more Berry Amendment-compliant shoe models corresponding to a shoe type category comes into the commercial marketplace at a cost and durability similar to that of shoes currently offered to recruits, following a wear test, services should ensure that recruits are able to purchase these shoes, and only these shoes, using their one-time cash allowance.”

Already, two Berry-compliant shoe types – stability and cushion/neutral – have been approved by the Fort Jackson Running Shoe Program. And, in fact, according to the official evaluation, the cushion/neutral platform “scored higher overall than any other neutral/cushioned running shoe we have tested thus far.” Neither of these platforms are being offered to new recruits despite the policy’s intent that if even one Berry-compliant shoe model became available and passed the wear test, it would be offered to new recruits as they enter basic training.

The Department’s own literature review on athletic footwear noted that the most important factor in ensuring the health and safety of new recruits when running is that every new recruit have a new, comfortable pair of running shoes that fit properly. The two Berry-compliant platforms that have already been approved would certainly help fulfill that goal. Therefore based on the intent of the policy statement, and the health of our servicemembers, these shoes should be made available to new recruits without further delay.

Furthermore, we continue to be concerned with the indefinite suspension of the Fort Jackson Running Shoe Program, which has prevented a third Berry-compliant platform from being approved. We were encouraged by the fact that in early 2016, New Balance, one of the domestic

footwear manufacturers which has taken an interest in fulfilling the 2014 policy, was asked to submit six samples of their motion-control platforms in specific sizes to fit the volunteer runners at Fort Jackson. This request seemed to suggest the FJRSP was up and running again but since that time, however, we have come to learn that testing has again come to a halt. As of May 17 – more than 90 days after the shoes were delivered – the FJRSP Director relayed through the Army and Air Force Exchange Service that “testing is still on hold until funding is made available by HQDA G4”.

Given that the test program is comprised of six volunteer runners under the supervision of a single civilian physical therapist, we find it difficult to believe funding is an issue and view the stand down of the FJRSP as another example of the Department’s intentional delay of its own policy change.

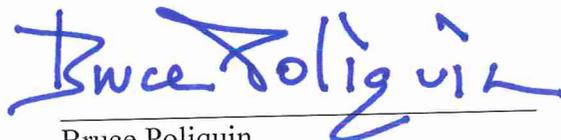
We believe that it is important to complete the testing on all Berry-compliant shoe platforms and we request that you work to ensure the Fort Jackson Running Shoe Program has the resources it needs to complete the mission it has been assigned. Since the issuance of the April 2014 policy change, industry has stepped up to meet the needs of new recruits and more companies have publicly stated that they will also have an interest in doing so once the Department finally implements the policy.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter and in light of the many months American manufacturers have already been put on hold waiting for an update, we look forward to your timely response.

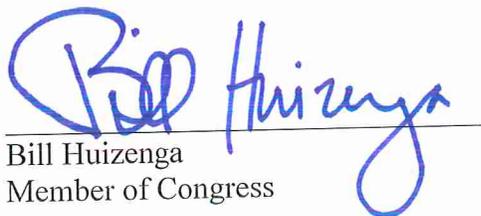
Sincerely,



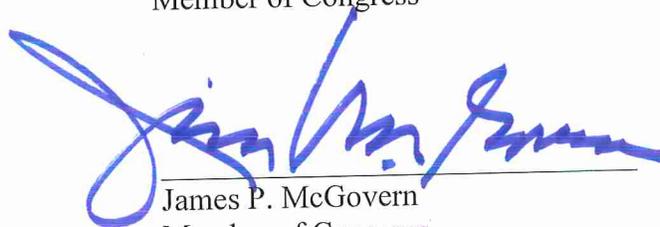
Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress



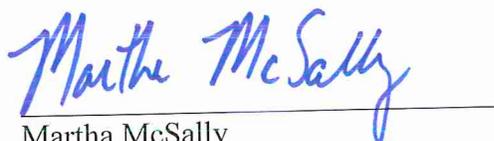
Bruce Poliquin
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