

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plaskett Wins Adoption Of Important Amendment In 2018 National Defense Authorization Act

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Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett, a Member of the House Committee on Agriculture and the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, released the following after the passage of her amendment to H.R. 2810, FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

“The National Defense Authorization Act is designed to meet the threats we face today as well as into the future. The results of our work here today will reflect our strong commitment to ensuring that the men and women of our Armed Services receive the benefits and support that they deserve for their faithful service including the great service members of the Virgin Islands. Building on our efforts from previous years, this bill

contains some initiatives designed to provide the resources and support needed for the men and women who keep our nation safe including my amendment that was offered and accepted by the House of Representatives today.

"My amendment will move the U.S. Virgin Islands service members from the Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA) Program to the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) Program. The BAH Program provides an allowance to service members in the fifty states and District of Columbia. These members receive the full maximum rental allowance for each locality and grade/rank, even if the rent is below that maximum.

"In contrast, the OHA program, which provides an allowance to service members everywhere else, which previous to the amendment included the Virgin Islands, is a cost reimbursement base allowance. These members only receive their rental rate, even if it is lower than the maximum allowable rate for the locality and grade. Under OHA, a member's reimbursement can also be further reduced for various reasons, including having non-dependents living in the housing unit. Therefore, the Virgin Islands Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) members have had no incentive to economize their housing.

"Military service members in the U.S. Virgin Islands should receive the same housing allowance as the members in the 50 states and District of Columbia. The U.S. Virgin Islands is a part of the United States and should not be treated as a foreign military location. Under OHA, the Virgin Islands AGR members must provide documentation of housing expenses and participate in utility expense surveys. By switching to BAH, this burden will be eliminated. The amendment adopted today will lead to an improved quality of life and can incentivize the members to economize on housing because they will keep the difference between the BAH rate and their housing cost.

"This bill also raises military pay by 2.4 percent, which is above the President's request for an increase of 2.1 percent and authorizes an extension of a wide array of bonuses and special, and incentive pays for our men and women in uniform. This bill also acknowledges that climate change is a direct threat to U.S. national security interests and requires a report on vulnerabilities to military installations and combatant commands as well as the mitigations that may be necessary to ensure installation and mission resiliency in the face of climate change.

"The passing of this bill today is the first step in passing yet another National Defense Authorization Act. This particular bill is seen as the gold standard for Congressional bipartisanship and transparency. Despite disagreements on key issues, Members have never failed to come to a consensus on behalf of our fighting men and women. I am proud of the work we have done here today."