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April 2, 2012

The Honorable John Culberson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Bishop:

The American Lung Association is pleased to submit this testimony in support of funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The American Lung Association was founded in 1904 to fight tuberculosis and today, our mission is **to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease**. The Lung Association accomplishes this through research, advocacy and education.

The VA is a very important component in the fight against respiratory disease. It provides health care to the over 400,000 veterans with chronic lung disease. While the Lung Association's mission is focused on lung health, it is a voluntary health agency committed to public health. The Lung Association recognizes the tremendous need for research into acute traumatic and central nervous system injuries to help our young men and women who are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The American Lung Association also recognizes that bioterrorism and other threats our troops are under will likely impact their lung health.

The American Lung Association wants to acknowledge the Committee for increasing funds to the Medical and Prosthetic Research Program at the VA, appropriating \$581 million for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, an increase from FY11 levels. This investment will save lives but more is needed.

For Fiscal Year 20133, the American Lung Association recommends and supports increasing VA Medical and Prosthetics Research to \$611 million. This request is \$30 million over the FY12 appropriation. Thirty million dollars is needed to keep the medical research funding on pace with inflation. This funding level will also allow the VA to address the very critical needs of the returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. **The Lung Association also recommends an additional \$200 million for the VA's construction budget in order to fix the VA's laboratory infrastructure.**

There are three areas we would like to call your attention to here: tobacco use; respiratory health issues faced by soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan; and the need to fund VA's research infrastructure.

Tobacco Use in the Military

Tobacco use is a significant public health problem for the Veterans Administration. The American Lung Association urges the Department of Defense (DoD) and the VA to fully implement the recommendations in the Institute of Medicine's report *Combating Tobacco Use in Military and Veterans Populations*.

The Lung Association would like to particularly draw your attention toward the IOM's recommendation that all VA healthcare facilities become tobacco free. In its FY13 budget request, the VA indicated its desire to follow this recommendation by proposing to eliminate all smoking areas in healthcare facilities. Public Law 102-585 requires these smoking areas, so Congress must act here to protect the health of veterans and the workers at VA facilities.

Respiratory Health Issues

The American Lung Association is troubled by reports of soldiers and civilians returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with lung illnesses. Research is beginning to show that the air troops breathe in the war theater can have high concentrations of particulate matter, which can cause or worsen lung disease. Data from a 2009 study of soldiers deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan found that 14 percent of them suffered new-onset respiratory symptoms, a much higher rate than their non-deployed colleagues. The American Lung Association urges that immediate steps be taken to minimize troop exposure to pollutants and that the VA, with the Department of Defense, investigate pollutants in the air our troops breathe.

Research Infrastructure

The American Lung Association understands that the VA research infrastructure is in need of significant attention. A research program needs to have modern, well-maintained laboratories to be successful. The VA's research infrastructure has been deteriorating and funds are urgently needed to upgrade, repair or replace research space and equipment. A state-of-the-art physical environment for research promotes excellence in science as well as teaching and patient care. It also helps VA recruit and retain the best and brightest clinician-scientists to care for our nation's veterans. The Lung Association joins its partner organizations and requests that Congress provide \$150 million for five major construction projects and \$50 million for minor construction, and maintenance and repair.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CD Connor', written in a cursive style.

Charles D. Connor, Capt. U.S. Navy (ret.)
President and CEO