



BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION

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February 24, 2009

The Honorable John P. Murtha
Chair
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
U. S. House of Representatives

The Honorable C. W. Bill Young
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
U. S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Murtha and Ranking Member Young:

As organizations dedicated to serving our nation's veterans, we are pleased to join in supporting the programmatic request of continuing directed funding in FY 2010 requested by Representatives Moran, and other Representatives, and Senator Bond and other Senators, for the inclusion of \$10 million dedicated, stand-alone for Eye Trauma and Vision research program in the Department of Defense's (DoD) Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP).

Serious combat eye trauma from Operation Iraq Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) has climbed to the second most common injury from the wars only behind Hearing loss according to Office VA Research & Development article October 2008.(www.researchva.gov) The November 2008 Medical Surveillance Defense Monthly Report from Armed Forces Health Center reported 4,970 moderate to severe penetrating combat eye injured, with 8,441 retinal and choroidal hemorrhage injuries, 686 optic nerve injured, along with 4,294 chemical and thermal burn injuries, occurring between 1998 through end of December 2007 with majority of these occurring during OIF and OEF war operational years.

VA Poly Trauma Center in Palo Alto, and Hines VAMC Low vision Clinic both found in TBI vision screening that 63% and 68% respectively, screened positive for variety of visual dysfunction related to there TBI but both reported 80% complain of visual symptoms. Estimates are high by experts that more service members may have some visual impairment associated with TBI but further screening programs are now starting. Vision TBI research is vital to ensuring more treatment options for these TBI complications. Not unlike the existing specialized research programs on burns, limb prosthetics, PTSD, and spinal cord injuries currently part of CDMRP efforts, a dedicated funding source for vision research grants will allow for the exploration of new and promising research opportunities.

We strongly recommend that existing initiatives to help military personnel and all veterans diagnosed with either combat eye trauma or Traumatic Brain Injuries with visual dysfunction be complemented by a dedicated Peer Reviewed Vision Research program" that would deepen our understanding of and accelerate the development of new treatments for eye trauma. A concentrated and focused research effort holds the promise of leading to new approaches to treatment of those who have suffered vision loss as a result of there injuries is necessary to uphold our promise to provide for improved treatment outcomes for these combat eye injured. This research on eye injuries would of course benefit all other American citizens who suffer from eye injuries.

Again, today battlefield conditions have resulted in 13 percent of all those wounded being evacuated to have eye injuries and TBI vision dysfunction due to blast forces occur in 64% of those screened. Vision research has been funded in the past through the Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program, an omnibus research initiative within the CDMRP and each year the numbers of applications for this funding has increased while the amounts granted have been stable. Although high-quality Vision research has been supported in this manner, the funding system has been insufficient to support a dynamic and vibrant eye trauma research program.

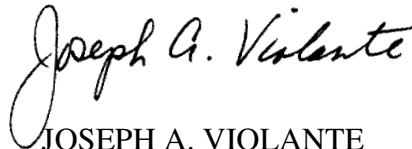
CHARTERED BY THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

A stable and consistent source of funding would encourage the individual and institutional commitment that will be necessary for projects that aim at unraveling the promise and developing treatments for those already living with eye trauma diagnosis. Whether a soldier is engaged directly in combat conditions or in activities which support the military, vision is the most critical of the five senses for optimal performance accounting for 70% of our awareness occurring from visual input. Vision is also the sense most vulnerable to injury, both acute and chronic. The treatment of acute eye injury can determine the extent of resulting vision impairment or chronic eye disease and the associated need for vision rehabilitation. As a result, the ability to effectively treat acute eye damage can have long-term implications for an individual's vision health, productivity, and quality of life for the remainder of their military service and into their civilian lives as well as the family members. This also has a potentially significant economic impact in terms of the long-term cost of veterans' healthcare.

Our nation has seen great advances in the fight against many diseases, but much remains to be done for those who have returned with serious penetrating eye wounds and other trauma so we can begin to improve the visual outcomes for our veterans. We urge your support for continued directed "Eye and Vision Research" including funding for \$ 10 million program as part of the CDMRP in FY 2010 again and we appreciate your leadership on these vital defense research programs. The following organizations respectively ask for your full support.



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