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Dear COL Diamonti and COL Norwood:

On behalf of the members of the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA), National Textile Association (NTA) and the Parachute Industry Association (PIA), we are writing to make you aware of the dire state of the U.S. textile, apparel and footwear manufacturing industry. Together, we represent over 500 members of this industry that are struggling to maintain enough work to retain their current employment base. During a time of war when the U.S. government is equipping our soldiers for combat, the natural assumption is that there should be ample contracts available for these companies. Unfortunately, this is not the case and although some segments of the industry are more negatively affected than others, the overall situation across the entire industry is extremely serious.

The AAFA represents over 400 textile, apparel and footwear companies. Many of these companies support the military supplying every sewn product that makes up the individual equipment of a soldier—ranging from uniforms, socks, hats and boots to utility bags, sleeping systems, parachutes and tents. The AAFA Government Contracts Committee is composed of companies that make up every part of the supply chain from fiber producers to textile manufacturers to apparel producers, as well as the makers of buttons, thread, zippers and other trim items required for uniforms and footwear. Many of these manufacturers subsist solely on these military contracts as there is virtually no commercial work available for U.S. domestic apparel and footwear manufacturers. The situation for the suppliers of yarns, fabrics and trims is only marginally better as their field is also quite limited. Furthermore, the unique products our industry produces for the military are specialized and can not simply be repackaged for sale on the commercial market.

The NTA represents 129 member companies, the majority of which are directly engaged in the manufacturing of fabrics in the United States and is the largest and oldest organization of fabric-makers in the U.S. NTA can attest to the continued decline of the textile industry with over 800 textile plant closings since 1997 and a one-third drop in employment over the past 5 years. The PIA has also been significantly impacted to the point where there is genuine concern that the capabilities in this field are already slipping away. PIA currently has over 200 members who have laid-off an estimated 60% of their employees. There is no question that many of the remaining companies in this industry would not be in business today if not for the Berry Amendment, and we encourage continued strong support for this procurement law.

However, the Berry Amendment alone can not sustain this industry if the policies and procedures that the military uses to procure items from our industry are structured and implemented in such a way that does not consider the survival of the industrial base. This has been the experience of this industry, which has resulted in the representatives of our industry reaching out to the military to attempt to solve these problems expeditiously before companies and factories supplying the military begin to shutter across the country. Our efforts have been focused on our two largest military customers – Defense Logistics Agency and the Army.

The industry has identified some of the primary causes for the current situation, including unexpected reductions in procurements for the war effort. However, it is the method with which these reductions have been implemented that have not allowed for an adequate phase-out of products or a sufficiently gradual decline in manufacturing in order to allow companies to transition smoothly. This is essential for the survival of the industrial base so that the base may continue to function and supply products in the future. Other issues relating to solicitations and contract management have also contributed to the current dire state of the industry. These issues have been outlined by the industry in meetings with both the DLA and the Army, as the industry believes the solutions should be developed by working together to effect the changes needed to ensure the viability of the industrial base of textile, apparel and footwear manufacturers, and supply our men and women in uniform with the best available products.

As you know, a group of our industry representatives including Felicia Cheek, AAFA; Bill Gerrow, Performance Textiles and PIA Executive Board Representative; Bill Kernodle, Clemson Apparel Research Center; Michael Mansh, Pennsylvania Apparel, LLC and AAFA GCC Chairman; Dan Pezold, Duro Industries and NTA GR Chairman; and Hardy Poole, NTA, took the initiative to set up separate meetings with the Army and DLA. The ultimate goal of this group has always been to have a joint meeting to address the issues of concern between the Army and DLA. It is our urgent request that this joint meeting take place as soon as is possible. The industry is depending on the results of these efforts to survive.

We believe that it is vitally important that DLA and the Army join together with industry to find solutions where all parties will benefit. Please feel free to contact us for more information and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Kevin M. Burke
President & CEO
American Apparel & Footwear Association



Karl Spilhaus
President
National Textile Association



Cliff Schmecke
President
Parachute Industry Association

CC: Mr. Dennis Dudek, Deputy Director, C&T, DSCP
LTC John Lemondes, PM Clothing & Ind. Equipment
AAFA Government Contracts Committee
NTA Membership
PIA Membership