July 25, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510


The Military Coalition (TMC), a consortium of uniformed services and veterans organizations representing more than 5.5 million current and former servicemembers and their families and survivors writes today in strong support of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s (CFPB) final rule on Arbitration Agreements (Docket No. CFPB-2016-0020; RIN 3170-AA51). The final rule addresses the widespread harm of forced arbitration by preserving the ability of service members and other consumers to band together to seek relief through the civil justice system when financial institutions have broken the law. We applaud the CFPB for moving forward on this rule that recognizes the detrimental effects of forced arbitration and class action waivers on our brave men and women in uniform.

Forced arbitration is an un-American system wherein service members’ claims against a corporation are funneled into a rigged, secretive system in which all the rules, including the choice of the arbitrator, are picked by the corporation. Found in almost every financial services contract, forced arbitration clauses systematically include a provision banning the rights of consumers to band together to hold a corporation accountable. Given the exponential and expansive use of these clauses by financial institutions in contracts with service members, prohibiting the practice of forcing service members to surrender fundamental Constitutional and statutory rights through the use of pre-dispute forced arbitration clauses is now more critical than ever.

Our service members protect our nation against both foreign and domestic threats. The sacrifices and logistical undertakings they and their families make in order to serve are compelling reasons alone to ensure they are not only shielded from predatory financial practices and unscrupulous lenders, but are also able to enforce their congressionally mandated rights through our civil justice system if and when violations arise.

However, class action waivers work against these rights. They are particularly abusive when enforced against service members, who may not be in a position to individually challenge a financial institution’s illegal or unfair practices because of limited resources or frequent relocations or deployment. Furthermore, for those service members on active duty and serving overseas, it is critical to retain the ability to get justice without having to interrupt their service and distract their attention from the mission at hand. Since these types of service members cannot participate full time in pursuing an individual claim, being able to enforce their rights through the class action mechanism is essential. Thus service members should receive the benefits of participating in a class action despite their inability to shoulder the burden of bringing a claim alone.
Our nation’s veterans should not be deprived of the Constitutional rights and freedoms that they put their lives on the line to protect, including the right to have their claims heard in a trial by a jury when their rights are violated. The catastrophic consequences these clauses pose for our all-voluntary military fighting force’s morale and our national security are vital reasons for this rule to take effect immediately.

Sincerely,

The Military Coalition
(Signatures attached)
Air Force Association

Air Force Sergeants Association

Air Force Women Officers Association

Army Aviation Association of America

AMSUS, The Society of Federal Health Professionals

Association of the United States Navy

Commissioned Officers Assn. of the US Public Health Service, Inc

CWOA, US Coast Guard

Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the US

Fleet Reserve Association

Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America

Jewish War Veterans of the USA

Marine Corps League

Marine Corps Reserve Association

Military Officers Association of America

Military Order of the Purple Heart

National Guard Assn. of the US

National Military Family Association

Naval Enlisted Reserve Assn.

Non Commissioned Officers Assn. of the United States of America

Reserve Officers Association

Service Women’s Action Network

The Military Chaplains Assn. of the USA

The Retired Enlisted Assn.

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

USCG Chief Petty Officers Assn.

US Army Warrant Officers Assn.

Vietnam Veterans of America