

**Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan**  
**Northern Mariana Islands**  
**Before the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs**  
**Tuesday, April 2, 2019**

---

Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz, Ranking Member Carter,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the needs of the veterans in my district.

These men and women of the Marianas served in the same military as other Americans. They fought the same conflicts. They suffered the same physical, mental, and spiritual wounds of war as their brothers and sisters from other states and territories.

Yet, still, to this day, Marianas veterans do not have access to the same basic VA services and benefits that are available everywhere else in America.

The Northern Marianas is the only jurisdiction in the nation without a full-time VA clinic staffed by VA health-care providers.

The Northern Marianas is the only U.S. area without a Vet Center. So, Marianas veterans do not have access to the full range of readjustment counseling and other help for themselves and their families to transition successfully to civilian life.

The veterans I represent do not even have a VA benefits office to go to when they need help with the services they have earned. So, many never get those services at all.

You probably have small towns in your own districts also without a VA clinic or a vets center or a benefits office. But here is the difference: Marianas veterans cannot get in a car and drive to the nearest city to access VA care or services. We are islands. The nearest services are across miles of ocean. My veterans must pay hundreds of dollars for a plane ticket and hotel accommodations to get help from the VA.

Or they wait, for months and months, until someone from the VA parachutes in for a few hours. And then they are gone.

There used to be a way for Members of Congress to address disparities of this kind by directing funds to solve the problem. Unfortunately, in recent years, Congress has relinquished some its powers of the purse, enshrined in the Constitution, leaving these decisions in the hands of nameless bureaucrats.

So I became a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee to raise these issues of disparity and get help for my veterans from the VA.

Thankfully, we have seen some improvements. The VA Pacific Islands Health Care System hired a licensed clinical social worker for the Marianas and upgraded telehealth services and specialty care visits. Guam Vet Center staff are making occasional outreach visits. VBA visits have become more regular.

These are all steps in the right direction. We are grateful for the improvements. But we still have a long way to go to reach parity.

My veterans need a full-time VA clinic, staffed with VA providers. They need a full-time, staffed Vet Center. They need a full-time, staffed Veterans Benefits Office.

These are basic services afforded to veterans in every state and territory of America – except in the Marianas.

These are basic services that veterans in the Northern Marianas have earned, serving this country honorably and with distinction for generations - even before the Marianas became part of America.

Veterans in the Marianas deserve no less than veterans anywhere else in our nation.

We must do better.