

The Honorable Mark Takano

41st District, California

HASC FY20 NDAA Member Day

Work for Warriors & Deaf Demonstration Program

Charmain Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, and other Members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

First, I am here to advocate for the Work for Warriors program.

Work for Warriors was created to address the disproportionately higher unemployment rates among members of the National Guard and military spouses. The underlying model for this program connects with local businesses to identify job openings, seek out qualified and currently unemployed applicants, and help individuals to navigate the resume, interview, and hiring process.

California has one of the largest Work for Warriors programs in the country, along with Nevada, South Carolina, and Washington State. Programs are also being developed in Florida, Tennessee, Colorado, North Carolina, and other states.

My proposed language would create a national Work for

Warriors pilot program that mirrors these State direct employment programs to provide direct job placement and related employment assistance to members of the National Guard and Reserve as well as military spouses and veterans.

A WFW provision has been included in the House NDAA every year since 2014 – and I hope to continue the longstanding practice of this Committee to support our veterans and members of the National Guard and Reserves by including this pilot program in the NDAA.

As Chairman of the Veterans Affairs committee, one of my top priorities is ensuring that our veterans have the resources they need to succeed.

The Work for Warriors program has been extremely successful in my home state of California and has placed more than 5,000 individuals in jobs. The other states I have mentioned have enjoyed comparable success through this program.

The Work For Warriors job placement services provides a sense of stability, purpose and continuity for those in the program – and we can deliver on this same successful model nationwide by creating a pilot program through DOD.

Although successful federal veterans' employment initiatives can cost more than \$10,000 per placement, WFW has a total

per placement cost of roughly \$1,100. This staggering difference is a testament to the incredible value that a national WFW program could bring to countless National Guardsmen, Reservists, and veterans.

As we continue to seek out ways to improve outcomes, create new opportunities, and provide adequate support and care for members of our armed services and veterans, we must recognize the programs that are successful and make the appropriate investments to support those programs. Work for Warriors is a strong example of an investment that we should be rushing to make.

I am also here to advocate for another important initiative, the Keith Nolan Air Force Deaf Demonstration program.

This language would create an Air Force demonstration program for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to access as officers of the Air Force as long as they continue to meet all other essential qualifications for accession as an officer in the Air Force.

This provision is inspired by a young Deaf man named Keith Nolan, a teacher at the Maryland School for the Deaf who successfully completed two levels of Army ROTC. Keith was preparing to take the next step, when he was informed that he could not continue with his service because he is Deaf. I have

no doubt that the Air Force would have been strengthened by Keith's service, and we should not be so quick to turn away individuals who proudly look to serve.

Individuals who want to serve should have the opportunity to do so. This demonstration program would give them the opportunity to serve the country they love.

I am thankful my amendment to create this program was included by the Committee in last year's NDAA. It is my sincere hope that it will be included again during this year's reauthorization. I am excited that we are taking this step forward to give the Deaf community a chance to defend the country they love.

I urge you to support the inclusion of both the Work for Warriors and the Keith Nolan Air Force Deaf Demonstration programs and I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions.