

September 10, 2019  
Testimony presented to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee  
by Congresswoman Jahana Hayes

Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Roe, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today. Veterans' affairs are extremely important to both me and my constituents, and I appreciate the opportunity to be able to outline my priorities for you.

Even before being elected to Congress, doing right by the veterans that have served our country, and their families, has been a priority for me. Connecticut's 5th District is home to so many of those brave men and women – I am grateful for their service and in awe of the sacrifices made by them and their families. But too often we fail these heroes by not providing the services they need when they return home. When our veterans cannot access quality healthcare, find a steady paying job, or a place to live – we have failed. We can, and must, do better. That is why the work of this Committee is so vitally important. Through this committee and the leadership of Chairman Takano, Congress is making sure that soldiers exposed to Agent Orange or burn pits get necessary treatment, that vets utilizing the GI bill are not taken advantage of by predatory for-profit colleges, and that any veteran struggling with mental health issues is able to access suicide prevention resources, to name a few.

Today, I would like to use this opportunity to review some of my legislative priorities that fall within the Committee's jurisdiction.

As a teacher, I would like to start with education! Upon returning from service many veterans utilize the GI Bill to help fund their education. Unfortunately, veterans are often targeted by predatory for-profit institutions who seek to benefit from their enrollment. One way they do this is by exploiting the 90/10 Rule. The 90/10 Rule is a provision in the Higher Education Act (HEA) that prohibits for-profit institutions from receiving more than 90 percent of their revenue from federal student aid. This includes such things as Pell grants and loans but does not include GI Bill benefits or other military tuition assistance. So, these institutions can receive 90 percent of their revenue from federal student aid and still access a student veteran's GI bill benefits. This practice is dishonest and unfair. This loophole should be done away with.

Another pressing issue facing our veterans is access to health care – both physical and mental. Each day 20 veterans, servicemembers, reservists, and members of the National Guard take their own life. That is 20 too many. I look forward to working with the committee to address the issue of veteran suicide and ensure that no soldier is left without the resources they need when they return home. Whether it is increased funding for medical care or ensuring that suicide prevention hotlines are adequately staffed, we owe these heroes this level of investment.

Part of that care is figuring out new ways to better serve our veterans and get them the health care they need. Medicinal marijuana has been shown to help patients relieve insomnia, anxiety, pain, and even epilepsy. I believe that all patients deserve access to medicinal marijuana as a way to treat their chronic pain, PTSD, and other conditions. In speaking with veterans across my district, I have also learned that medicinal marijuana is particularly helpful for those suffering from PTSD. That is why I cosponsored H.R. 712, the *VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act of 2019*. This bill would allow the VA to study the effect of cannabis on health outcomes for adults with chronic pain and PTSD.

We must also ensure that veterans that are exposed to hazardous materials like burn pits or Agent Orange are able to obtain the medical treatment they need. That is why I was proud to cosponsor and vote for your bill, Mr. Chairman, H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act*.

When I meet with veterans across my district, one of the issues I hear about most is the financial instability many veterans face. There are several bills that address this issue and would give veterans the compensation and benefits they earned. Congress passed H.R. 1200, the *Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2019*, which would give veterans a raise, as well as the *Gold Star Family Tax Relief Act*, which will ensure that the benefits that veterans' families receive

are not taxed at an unfair rate. Additionally, we must reduce unemployment and homelessness among veterans. H.R. 95, the *Homeless Veteran Families Act*, and H.R. 444, the *Reduce Unemployment for Veterans of All Ages Act of 2019* would both go a long way in helping to combat these issues, and I am a proud cosponsor of each of these bills.

When I visit with Gold Star families across my district, the offset between SBP and DIC benefits is one of the most common issues I hear about. That is why I worked with this Committee and the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to introduce the bipartisan *Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Improvement Act*, H.R. 3221. This bill would give Gold Star families an additional \$300 per month. This allowance would bring benefits for surviving military families more in line with federal employees and the DOD's SBP. The death of a service member should never lead a family to financial hardship, and we owe it to these heroes to give their families the full benefits they have earned.

Finally, one of the areas I am most concerned about is female veterans. Currently, 10% of all veterans are female. That number is expected to rise by as much as 6.3% in the next 25 years! This is great news, however, many of the services offered to our veterans are not designed for women and do not adequately meet their needs. We must ensure that female veterans are able to get the health care they need, including access to an OB/GYN at the VA. But we must also make sure

they have greater access to legal services. That is why I cosponsored H.R. 3189, the *Improving Legal Services for Female Veterans Act*, which would require the VA to partner with an NGO to provide legal services to female veterans.

Later today, my office will meet with the Connecticut Veterans of Foreign Wars to discuss what else we in Congress can do to help our veterans. They are doing great work on behalf of veterans in my state, and I am excited to hear from them.

Thank you again for this opportunity, Mr. Chairman. This Committee has done a lot of great work, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on these priorities and appreciate your time.