

**To:** Mr Buddy. Carter

**From:** Hart

**Date:** 9.5.19

**Re:** House Veterans Affairs Committee Member Day Testimony  
– Talking Points

**Talking Points:**

- Thank you Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe for having us all here to testify on behalf of our constituents.
- In the First Congressional District of Georgia, I have the honor and privilege of representing nearly 60,000 veterans.
- Unfortunately, although we have a large number of veterans in Coastal Georgia, our nearest VA Hospitals are 2 hours away – in Charleston, South Carolina and Dublin, Georgia.
- Creating better access to health care for veterans has been one of my highest priorities while serving in Congress.
- This is why, I supported the *VA Mission Act* during the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, specifically with its provisions that authorized VA hospitals to use telemedicine across state lines.
- I applaud the President signing the VA Mission Act into law.

- However, after meeting with VA officials, they brought to my attention that trainees were not authorized in the law to use the telemedicine system.
- Although likely a simple mistake in the legislation, this creates major problems in VA hospitals for a number of reasons.
- Most notably, it puts VA providers in legally precarious positions because the VA uses trainees in all aspects of care – just like in non-VA hospitals.
- Additionally, it puts trainees behind the 8 ball, missing a critical piece of accumulated experience – the telemedicine system - when working to eventually become a doctor.
- Earlier this Congress, I introduced H.R. 3228, the *VA Mission Telehealth Clarification Act*, to remedy this issue.
- The bill now has bipartisan support among Committee Members and I hope you all will consider the legislation in front of the Committee as soon as possible.
- Next, I hope the Committee will continue to make strides in improving the veterans appeals process.
- I am proud that Congress passed and the President signed into law the *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act* which became effective this past February.

- As this law moves forward, I encourage the Committee to review its progress, continue to find ways in which it can be improved, and see how the VA can answer our constituents' appeals in a more efficient and accurate fashion.
- Finally, I trust that the Committee will keep veteran homelessness as one of its highest priorities for the remainder of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.
- Today, there are still just under 40,000 homeless veterans in America.
- Another 1.4 million veterans are at risk of homelessness.
- 11% of the U.S. homeless population are veterans.
- Too many of those are in the First Congressional District of Georgia.
- These numbers are unacceptable.
- We need to reassess all of our federal programs working to combat veteran homelessness, but especially the accessibility of VA loans and the guidance given to veterans reintegrating into a civilian society.
- In all of these issues I have mentioned today, we need to remember that our nation's veterans are our heroes and

they deserve the absolute highest respect upon their return home.

- The federal government simply can do better in veterans' access to health care, the appeals process, homelessness, and so much more.
- Thank you for your work on these issues.
- I look forward to following your progress.