

Representative Earl L. “Buddy” Carter

Testimony

5/26/2021

House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Member Day Hearing

Member Day Testimony

- Thank you, Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Bost.
- First, I would like to thank the Committee for its work on the VA Mission Telehealth Clarification Act last Congress.
- With its passage as a part of the NDAA, trainees working at VA can now participate in important telehealth programs serving our veterans.
- It is critically important that our Veterans are able to access care no matter where they are.
- And I am pleased that this remains a priority for the Committee.
- That said, the VA’s Community Care Program continues to be an issue for the Veterans in Georgia’s First District.
- Our district does not have a VA Medical Center.
- Which means, in order to receive any emergency care or specialty procedures they need to travel, sometimes great distances.
- Like many other districts, we only have outpatient clinics and lean on the ability for veterans to receive care in the community.
- However, the number one complaint I receive is that a veteran is unable to see a provider locally and must travel hours away to a VA Medical Center.
- I urge the Committee to continue improving the Community Care Program to be convenient and effective for our veterans and providers.
- Next, I would like to highlight the need for improved mental health services for veterans.

- Our men and women in uniform have some of the most rigorous and difficult jobs that exist.
- They deploy to every corner of the globe and brave combat in order to protect our freedoms.
- Just as we care for the physical wounds “for him who shall have borne the battle,” we must care for the mental health of our veterans.
- Mental health issues among veterans can disproportionately lead to drug abuse, homelessness, and suicide.
- One veteran suicide or one homeless veteran is one too many.
- And we must end the tragic statistic that as many as 20 veterans die by suicide every day.
- Further, the isolation and anxiety of the COVID-19 has added even more stress for our veterans, exacerbating an already significant mental health challenge.
- In fact, VA facilities around the country have reported dramatic increases in virtual mental health services during the pandemic.
- The Committee must ensure that the VA is equipped to address the increased demand for mental health services.
- Lastly, although the National Personnel Record Center does not fall under the Department of Veterans Affairs,
- I would like to emphasize the need clear the backlog of record requests.
- While the NPRC has returned to a pre-pandemic level of operations, there remains a significant backlog of approximately 500,000 requests.
- These records are necessary to complete Veterans’ claims for compensation, care, and other benefits.

- Without them, a veteran is stuck waiting for the NPRC to clear its backlog before he or she can complete their claim.
- Please do everything within the Committee's power to ensure our Veterans are not deprived of their essential care.
- Thank you again for providing this opportunity to share the priorities and concerns of the veterans in my district.
- I look forward to working with the Committee to provide the best care and benefits possible for our veterans.