

**Congressman French Hill  
Veterans' Affairs Committee Member Day  
Written Testimony  
Wednesday, May 26, 2021**

Good morning,

I would like to thank Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, and fellow members of the Committee for this opportunity.

Although I do not have a specific piece of legislation before this committee at this time, I appreciate the chance to testify in front of you today about issues that are important to the veterans in my home state of Arkansas. Let me thank you, Mr. Chairman, for visiting my district and meeting veterans and VA policy makers.

First, I have had the opportunity to have an incredible team of veteran caseworkers in my district offices. All of them have been veterans themselves and many have had several tours of combat duty overseas.

I currently have two veteran staffers that I was able to initially hire through the Wounded Warrior Foundation that are now permanent staffers.

Their ability to connect with veterans in Central Arkansas is incredible and their dedication to helping them slog through the bureaucratic muck that can be the VA and get them the benefits they have earned by serving our country has been one of the most rewarding things during my time in Congress.

My veterans' team has gotten back more than \$27 million in benefits for Arkansas's veterans during my six years in Congress, as well as helping numerous families get back lost medals.

Anything this committee can do to empower our veteran caseworkers and make the job of working with the VA easier will serve veterans around the country.

One issue my office is currently having is the time it takes to get veteran records on time from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) based in St. Louis, Missouri.

The inability of the NPRC to get veteran records on time to confirm their service is delaying burials.

My office currently has more than 150 pending requests for records, with the oldest being from November 2019.

I had a productive phone call earlier this year with the nation's Archivist, David Ferriero, about this very issue.

And, while I understand the COVID-19 pandemic has a major role to play in the current backlog of records, this committee must ensure that the backlog is being addressed and that records requests are going out in a timely manner.

Finally, I would like to briefly discuss my office's Women's Veteran Initiative.

This initiative was started by my staffer, Dlayne Tucciarone, who is an Air Force veteran.

Since our initial meeting in December 17, 2020, we have been able to engage with the community of female veterans in Central Arkansas.

More women are serving in the U.S. Armed Services than have at any time in U.S. history.

Over time, numerous steps have been taken to establish a more inclusive environment for women currently serving in the military as well as those who have separated.

Information and resources, which focus on specific needs for women in the military, have been initiated, but in some cases these resources have remained unaltered and are based on the initial movement of more women in the military.

Furthermore, the disbursement of information and resources that are available specifically for women is lacking.

It is only from female veterans themselves that we can learn and then ensure that the VA is adequately equipped to take care of the women that have bravely served our country.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions, and with that I yield back the balance of my time.