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SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION INTEGRITY, SECURITY,
AND ENFORCEMENT

Testimony before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
119th Congress Member Day Hearing
December 4, 2025

Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss key priorities facing veterans in California's 46th Congressional District and across the nation.

First, I would like to discuss the importance of ensuring our nation's heroes who gave their lives to defend our freedom are dutifully honored. Orange County, California is home to more than 100,000 veterans and yet remains the largest county in California without a dedicated veterans cemetery. It is important that we support federal programs that provide funding for veterans cemeteries to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. The Veterans Cemetery Grants Program (VCGP) is a critical program, but we need to ensure it is robustly funded and that it comprehensively takes into account the accessibility of existing facilities when making awards.

Establishing a cemetery in Orange County to serve our local veterans has received unprecedented, bipartisan support from local, state, and federal lawmakers and more than 100 veterans organizations. Currently, the closest veterans cemetery is Riverside National Cemetery. Families and loved ones must drive through severe traffic congestion and face long travel times to reach this cemetery, creating additional burdens for those who are grieving. Establishing a cemetery in Orange County will give local veterans the opportunity to be laid to rest in their home community, closer to their loved ones. It is important that we support programs like the VCGP that are used to fund veterans cemeteries in our local communities.

Another issue I would like to discuss is research on innovative therapies to treat conditions like posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and more. Every day we lose nearly 20 veterans to suicide. Oftentimes our veterans return with invisible wounds. While traditional treatments work for some, others are left behind to battle conditions long after their service to our country.

There is increasing evidence from preclinical studies and clinical trials supporting the use of psychedelic therapies, including MDMA and psilocybin, to treat mental health conditions. There are several psychedelic treatments in the pipeline for Food and Drug Administration approval within the next two to five years. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) researchers have conducted research on these substances using external funds, and last December the Department announced \$1.5 million in internal funding to study MDMA-assisted therapy for veterans with PTSD and alcohol use disorder. This is the first time VA funding has been used for research on psychedelic compounds since the 1960s.

It is important that we build on this announcement by creating centers to both continue this specialized research on psychedelic therapies but to also create a framework for treating veterans with these therapies once they receive FDA approval. That is why Rep. Jack Bergman and I introduced **H.R. 2623, the Innovative Therapies Centers of Excellence Act of 2025**. This bipartisan legislation will direct the VA to designate at least five centers of excellence for conducting research on psychedelic substances including MDMA, psilocybin, and ibogaine. Establishing these centers will ensure more research is conducted on therapies that could help treat our veterans. Once FDA approval is granted, these centers will be able to deliver psychedelic therapies and can develop education and training materials for health care personnel within the VA to treat veterans with these therapies. I ask for your support of this legislation, which will make sure our nation's heroes receive the most effective treatments for their invisible wounds.

I would also like to discuss the importance of ending the practice of deporting our nation's veterans. These veterans risked their lives for our nation and deserve our compassion and gratitude. Veterans should have a clear path to citizenship, which is why I am grateful to have joined Ranking Member Takano in introducing **H.R. 5535, the Veteran Service Recognition Act of 2025**. Our veterans served with honor and they should be treated with respect and dignity regardless of immigration status. This bill is an important step towards giving noncitizen veterans a pathway to citizenship in the country they put their lives on the line for.

Additionally, I would like to express concerns with potential changes to the VA's current surgical anesthesia patient safety standards. The current standard ties both nursing and physician standards to state licensure and nurse or medical practice laws. The Office of Nursing Services is proposing to create two different standards of care—the standard available in the veteran's community and a different, lower standard in VA hospitals. Our veterans deserve the same exact standard of care as others in the community, not a lower or different standard.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these issues today. I am grateful for your service and look forward to continuing to work together to support our veterans.