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Testimony of Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury
Before the House Veterans Affairs Committee
Member Day Hearing
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Thank you, Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano for the opportunity today to address the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Today, I come before you to discuss a critical issue that should be nonpartisan, that impacts veterans in every congressional district across the country—the mental illness crisis among our nation’s veterans and the need for additional support from Congress.

New Mexicans have a long and proud tradition of service that extends throughout our communities. As we reflect on the sacrifices made by service members, we must also recognize the challenges many veterans face upon returning home.

It is our solemn duty as Americans to ensure veterans and their families are respected, supported, and given access to the resources to live full and healthy lives after their service.

But too often, our servicemembers do not have the necessary support upon their return to deal with the invisible wounds of war—PTSD, depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and the conditions that compound them.

These challenges can be isolating and devastating, and when left untreated, they can lead to tragic outcomes.

In New Mexico, we have seen firsthand the consequences of inadequate access to care, particularly in rural and Tribal communities where long distances, workforce shortages, and cultural barriers further complicate treatment.

We know that Congress can play a role in supporting our nation’s veterans. The historic PACT Act, passed with bipartisan support, has been transformational in expanding VA health care and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances. We need that level of investment again to address the mental health crisis plaguing our nation’s veterans.

Before I close, I want to highlight concerns from my constituents, including the need to pass the Major Richard Star Act so veterans receive full medical retirement and VA disability without benefit offsets. I’ve also heard about delays in CHAMPVA benefits, limited provider access, and VA appeals that take a year or more.

I would be grateful to work with you to address these issues, save lives, restore dignity, and honor the service of those who sacrificed so much for us.

Thank you.