

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

Attn: Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Committee

Subject: Written Testimony from Rob Reynolds

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On: Expanding the Mission: *The Future of the National Center for Warrior Independence in West LA.*

My name is Rob Reynolds, and I am a U.S. Army veteran who served as an infantryman from 2006 to 2010. I deployed to Iraq in 2007 with the 10th Mountain Division, 4-31 Infantry, and earned the Combat Infantry Badge. That deployment was brutal. We lived in extremely harsh conditions in an area south of Baghdad known as the "Triangle of Death," which was heavily impacted by IEDs and an active insurgency. My unit sustained heavy casualties, including three soldiers who were kidnapped on May 12, 2007. We spent months searching for them and ultimately had to return home with two still missing. I had personally known and trained with one of those missing soldiers.

When I returned from Iraq, I struggled deeply to adjust to life being back home. I was also dealing with a physical injury that led to an addiction to prescription painkillers—an addiction that nearly cost me my life.

In 2018, I came to the West Los Angeles VA for PTSD treatment. What I saw there was shocking. Outside the gates, veterans were sleeping on the sidewalks, while inside, much of the 388-acre property sat vacant or was being leased out for private, non-veteran uses. The contrast was devastating. On land originally donated as a Soldiers' Home for disabled veterans, I saw athletic fields for private schools, a baseball stadium for UCLA, parking lots, oil drilling, and even a dog park for wealthy residents—while disabled veterans were sleeping on the street just outside the gates.

In 2019, there were only 54 housing units on that entire property, while an estimated 4,000 veterans were homeless in Los Angeles. Nothing had ever angered or motivated me more than seeing land donated for disabled veterans being used for nearly everything except that purpose.

That realization drove me to act. I began volunteering with homeless veterans during the Veterans Row encampment and helped move veterans off the street and onto VA grounds. I worked alongside other veteran advocates and had a direct hand in starting the CTRS tiny home program, which provides emergency shelter for veterans.

In 2022, I worked with Public Counsel, a pro bono law firm, and served as a witness in their lawsuit against the VA for illegally leasing VA land and failing to build housing for veterans. I testified for two days during the 2024 trial and attended every court hearing.

In April 2025, I met with Secretary Collins to discuss the West Los Angeles VA land-use issues, shortly before President Trump's May 9, 2025, Executive Order to establish the National Center for Warrior Independence—which I fully support.

For the past seven years, I have dedicated my life to advocating for homeless veterans and fighting to ensure that the West Los Angeles VA land is restored to its intended purpose—a home for disabled veterans.

I traveled to Washington, D.C., for the Committee on Veterans' Affairs hearing *Expanding the Mission: The Future of the National Center for Warrior Independence in West LA*. When I arrived, I was hopeful this would be an oversight hearing that finally addressed the illegal leases on the VA property—leases that have been paying tens of millions of dollars below market rates, according to the VA's own congressionally mandated report submitted at the end of 2025. In that report, the VA also stated that it could not verify or confirm the services UCLA and Brentwood School claim to provide to veterans.

Five federal judges have ruled that certain leases on the West Los Angeles VA are illegal: District Court Judges James Otero (2013) and David Carter (2024), and Ninth Circuit Judges Consuelo Callahan, Roopali Desai, and Ana de Alba (2025).

I expected the hearing, led by Chairman Bost, to thoroughly examine these illegal agreements and get to the bottom of the leases that Secretary Collins has said have been fleecing taxpayers and veterans for years. However, Chairman Bost did not include Brentwood School in this oversight hearing, which is very concerning, and he did not question anything about UCLA's baseball stadium lease. Instead, Chairman Bost devoted time to allowing a doctor from UCLA to speak about UCLA's academic affiliation agreement with the West LA VA—an entirely separate issue that is not at the center of contention. The real issue is the baseball stadium lease. When it comes to oversight and holding the illegal leaseholders at the VA

accountable for years of corruption and adverse court rulings, nothing was done. These matters were completely overlooked and ignored.

Furthermore, UCLA failed to pay rent for the Jackie Robinson Stadium for 14 months, only making payment after *The Los Angeles Times* and Spectrum News reported on it in November 2025.

In January 2021, while the Veterans Row encampment was ongoing and veterans were sleeping on the sidewalks outside the VA gates, UCLA and the VA negotiated a new deal allowing UCLA to amend its lease and build an additional practice baseball field on VA property. This arrangement was made in secret, and a former VA executive recorded a meeting in which VA officials discussed plans to keep this from veterans and advocates because they believed veterans would be “up in arms” if they found out another baseball field was being built.

After that recording became public, the Veterans Community Oversight and Engagement Board issued Recommendation 12-05A in March 2021 to VA Secretary Denis McDonough, urging termination of UCLA's second lease amendment because it disproportionately benefited UCLA's interests over those of veterans. Despite that, Secretary McDonough approved the lease amendment, and UCLA's new practice baseball field was constructed on VA land while veterans continued sleeping on the sidewalk outside the gates.

The deal with UCLA has been ripping veterans off. UCLA pays its baseball coach more in salary and bonuses than it pays for about ten acres of VA land. Under its lease, UCLA is also supposed to operate a legal clinic for veterans, but it significantly underperforms; veterans can only walk in for intake appointments on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month.

To justify its continued use of the property, UCLA always tries to conflate its academic affiliation agreement—which places resident physicians and fellows at the VA hospital—with its baseball lease. These are entirely separate agreements, and UCLA is compensated by the VA for that arrangement.

VAs across the country partner with universities, but none of them—except for UCLA—have a baseball stadium on VA land.

The courts have spoken, the evidence is clear, and the law is on the side of our veterans. What's missing is the will to enforce it. I'm asking this committee to ensure that these corrupt land-use deals are held accountable.

