

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
REP. GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
LEGISLATIVE HEARING
OCTOBER 13, 2021

Chairwoman Brownley, thank you for holding today's hearing.

Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill and I introduced H.R. 5543, the "Vet CENTERS for Mental Health Act of 2021," to give veterans in remote areas of America access to VA services closer to home.

This bill would establish new VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics and Vet Centers in presently underserved communities and make good on our promise to care for veterans without forcing them to travel long distances.

Take my district: the Mariana Islands. We have is no CBOC, no Vet Center, and no VA hospital, just a general practitioner on contract to see veterans part-time. As a result, veterans in my district sometimes fly 3,700 miles to Hawai'i or 6,000 miles to California to reach VA administered health care.

There are VA services on our neighbor island of Guam, but the logistics are a challenge. I know a veteran, a paraplegic, who cannot fly to Guam because none of the interisland air taxis can accommodate his wheelchair. This veteran had to charter a private boat out of his own pocket and brave 25 miles of open ocean to reach the VA CBOC in Guam. His electric wheelchair could not fit in the boat cabin; instead he was forced to endure the voyage lashed to the deck.

When I say that veterans in remote areas face unacceptable barriers to VA services, this man's experience is exactly what I have in mind.

H.R. 5543 will make life a little easier for veterans like my paraplegic constituent by establishing CBOCs and Vet Centers that are both closer to their homes and that provide services better attuned to veterans' needs.

A CBOC in the Marianas, for instance, would give our veterans access to a full-time, dedicated VA doctor and to the Caregiver program and other VA support.

A Vet Center in the Marianas would provide readjustment counseling and easily reached mental health services for veterans and their families.

I thank Congresswoman Sherrill, a strong advocate for her New Jersey veterans, for her leadership on this bill.

I thank the VFW, the American Legion, and Chairman Takano for their endorsement and I ask all my colleagues to support H.R. 5543.

This legislation will not only improve the situation I have described for veterans in my district, but will help veterans in more remote areas throughout our country, who face similar hardships, get more reliable access to VA healthcare.

The men and women of our armed forces went the distance for us in their time of service. Let us stop making them go such great distances, as veterans, to get the care they need.