

**TESTIMONY OF
H.E. CHARLES R. PAUL
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS TO THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BEFORE
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
HEARING ON**

H.R.2283, Recognizing Community Organizations for Veteran Engagement and Recovery Act (Rep. Bost); H.R.2426, Veterans Mental Health and Addiction Therapy Quality of Care Act (Rep. Fallon); Discussion draft, Veterans TBI Breakthrough Exploration of Adaptive Care Opportunities Nationwide Act of 2025 (Rep. Bergman); H.R.6444, Blast Overpressure Research and Mitigation Task Force Act (Rep. Jackson); Discussion draft, Data Driven Suicide Prevention and Outreach Act of 2025 (Rep. Mackenzie); Discussion draft, Veterans Health Desert Reform Act of 2025 (Rep. Miller-Meeks); H.R. 6526, Clarity on Care Options Act (Rep. Kiggans); Discussion draft, U.S. Vets of the FAS Act (Del. King Hinds); H.R. 4509, NOPAIN for Veterans Act; H.R. 5999, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish an opioid antagonist to a veteran without requiring a prescription or copayment; H.R. 6001, Veterans with ALS Reporting Act; Discussion draft, Whole Health for Veterans Act.

January 14, 2026

Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the U.S. Vets of the FAS Act, H.R. 6652, sponsored by Delegate King-Hinds and four other Members of the House, including Delegate Radewagen.

The Marshall Islands and the other FAS, Freely Associated States, were formerly administered by the United States as parts of a territory, but now are in the closest of possible relationships between sovereign nations with the U.S. We are the only three nations in free association with the U.S. Our associations are enshrined in compacts enacted into U.S. law.

Under these associations, we let the U.S. exercise a fundamental aspect of our sovereignty: Determining whether other nations can access an area the size of the 48 contiguous United States from Hawaii to Asia.

Our nations also host U.S. military bases. In my Marshall Islands, the Joint Chiefs of Staff say that the facility is the world's premiere range for testing ICBMs and military space operations support. Because of our location and the strategic rights that we let the U.S. exercise, our democracies are targets of aggressive efforts to weaken our alliances.

The U.S. military, additionally, recruits in the Freely Associated States as if we were U.S. States. It enlists our citizens at rates that are higher than the enlistment of U.S. citizens in most U.S. States.

Sadly, however, our U.S. military veterans are effectively compelled to remain in the U.S. after their service because they cannot receive the same healthcare if they return home.

This was a major issue in the renegotiation of our free association, which culminated in the enactment of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024. The law was intended to resolve the issue. By agreement, it included provisions to have this healthcare available in our islands -- as this Congress emphasized in November's Continuing Resolution and December's National Defense Authorization Act.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, however, has not acted to make the care available. It has acted contrary to what we negotiated, and Congress has said is the intent of the law.

The Government of the Marshall Islands, therefore, strongly supports the enactment of legislation to ensure that our veterans can receive the care if they return home.

This issue is personal at the highest levels of our government. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Honorable Kalani R. Kaneko, is himself a retired United States Army veteran who honorably served for twenty years, qualifying him for full retirement under U.S. military service. During his military career, he served as an Army recruiter for more than a decade, actively recruiting across the Marshall Islands. Through that service, he recruited approximately 200 Marshallese men and women into the United States Armed Forces—individuals who answered the call because they trusted the United States, believed in the partnership between our nations, and were willing to serve wherever they were sent. Minister Kaneko has dedicated his life in service to the United States and its mission. Today, I respectfully ask the United States to stand by Minister Kaneko, and by the patriotic men and women he recruited, by ensuring access to the veterans' health care they have earned.

This issue is also personal to me.

My younger brother medically retired after thirteen years of service in the United States Army, including three combat tours in Iraq. He retired due to injuries sustained during deployment. Today, he lives in the Marshall Islands, - and does not have access to health care he would have if he had not returned home.

My nephew is currently serving on active duty in the United States Army. He wants to return to the Marshall Islands one day to live, to raise a family, and to serve his

community after he retires from military service. But he worries about whether he will be able to access health care if he comes home. That concern should not be the deciding factor in whether a U.S. veteran can go home after their service.

Importantly, access to veterans' health care in the Marshall Islands is not a new request, nor is it discretionary. It is explicitly contemplated in U.S. law and in treaty obligations.

Section 209(a)(4)(A) of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024 directs the United States to enter into agreements to ensure the provision of veterans' services in the Freely Associated States. Congress made clear that geography should not exclude veterans residing in the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, or the Republic of Palau from the care they have earned.

That Compact obligation works in tandem with Section 1724(f) of title 38, United States Code, which authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to furnish hospital care and medical services outside the United States pursuant to agreements with foreign governments. Together, these provisions establish both clear authority and clear Congressional intent.

The Freely Associated States are unique. We are the only sovereign countries in the world where the United States is permitted—by international agreement—to conduct active, routine military recruiting nationwide, without restriction as if our nations were U.S. territories. If the United States can actively recruit in the islands as if we were U.S. territories, it is reasonable—and just—that it provides care in the islands as if we were U.S. territories.

This is not only a moral obligation. It is a national security issue for both of our countries.

Veterans living in the Marshall Islands are a stabilizing force. Their presence strengthens local institutions, reinforces trust in the RMI–U.S. relationship, solidifies a vital international relationship, and serves as a deterrent to malign influences that seek to undermine this partnership.

Veterans who return home bring critical skills acquired through military service—engineering, logistics, health care, leadership, disaster response, and technical trades—that directly support national capacity-building in the Marshall Islands.

From a practical standpoint, the current gap in care creates an excessive hardship for veterans if they come home. They must fly thousands of miles for routine appointments or prescriptions—at huge personal expense and often delaying care. Telehealth services, mail-order pharmacy delivery, and travel support are practical, cost-effective solutions.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands stands ready to work constructively with Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Administration to implement what the Compact Act of 2024 already promises.

Our veterans kept their commitment to the United States. 2024's Compact Amendments reflects the United States' commitment to them. Implementing equal veterans' health care in the Freely Associated States is not an expansion of benefits—it is fulfillment of an obligation.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.