

**June 30, 2026**  
**House Veterans Affairs Committee**  
**TOURS Act Written Testimony**

Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Trauma Outreach, Understanding, and Resiliency through Spirituality Act, commonly known as the TOURS Act.

My name is Brandon Wilson. I am a United States Marine Corps Veteran and currently serve as Chief Operating Officer of Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry (ABCCM), one of North Carolina's largest faith-based human service organizations. For more than four decades, our organization has served Veterans through housing, employment, behavioral health, healthcare, and supportive service programs.

Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of serving Veterans as a County Veterans Service Officer, State Veterans Service Officer, former Deputy Director of the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and was honored to serve as the Chairman of the VA Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans. Today, I oversee a wide array of programs serving Veterans, families, and individuals experiencing homelessness, behavioral health challenges, and economic hardship. Through the strategic blending and braiding of federal, state, local, philanthropic, and faith-based resources, we work to maximize every available investment and create sustainable solutions for the communities we serve. I have also served leadership roles within our Medicaid system, working closely with providers, health plans, community organizations, and policymakers to address the social drivers of health and improve outcomes for vulnerable populations across North Carolina. These experiences have given me a unique perspective on the growing intersection between Veterans Affairs, healthcare delivery,

Medicare, Medicaid, Behavioral Health, community-based support systems and the faith community.

Like many Veterans, my transition from military service was not a single event but a process. While my uniform came off, the search for purpose, identity, and belonging continued. My faith played an important role in helping me navigate that transition. It provided community, perspective, and a sense of purpose larger than myself.

One passage that became particularly meaningful during that season was Hebrews 10:24-25, (*'And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching'*.) This passage encourages us not to journey through life's challenges alone, but to remain connected to one another and encourage one another toward purpose and service. Looking back, I recognize that many of the factors that sustained me during transition; community, accountability, belonging, and hope and are the very same protective factors we seek to strengthen for Veterans today.

My support for the TOURS Act is also shaped by loss. On August 3rd, 2016, I lost a fellow Marine and friend, Cory Hafner, to suicide. Like so many families and communities, we were left asking what connections, relationships, or protective factors might have made a difference. It was during this time that VA chaplains and the strength of my faith helped carry me and my fellow Marines through our journey of grief, reminding us that healing is not only physical and mental it is often deeply spiritual as well. Throughout my career, I have worked with thousands of Veterans facing a wide array of challenges. One lesson has remained consistent: Veterans heal, recover, and successfully transition through connection, not isolation. The Veterans who thrive often reconnect with something larger than themselves, family, fellow Veterans, service, meaningful work, and a faith community. These connections provide belonging, accountability, purpose, and hope. At ABCCM we call this building intentional communities.

The Department of Veterans Affairs' 2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report identifies social isolation as a significant risk factor associated with suicide and highlights the importance of strengthening protective factors through meaningful connection and community support.

Yet despite the longstanding role chaplains have played throughout military service and within the VA, we still know relatively little about their measurable impact on Veteran outcomes.

Military and VA chaplains routinely walk alongside Service Members and Veterans through combat, grief, moral injury, transition, and recovery. They often help individuals navigate questions of meaning, purpose, guilt, forgiveness, and hope, issues that frequently underlie many of the challenges Veterans face.

The question before us is not whether chaplains are valuable. The question is whether we are willing to study their impact with the same rigor that we apply to other interventions within the VA system.

If engagement with chaplains contributes to stronger social connectedness, increased treatment engagement, improved mental health outcomes, or reduced suicide risk, we should understand that relationship. If certain approaches are effective, we should identify those best practices and replicate them.

At ABCCM, we have seen firsthand how chaplaincy can complement housing, behavioral health, employment, and healthcare services, when integrated appropriately. We have also benefited from the leadership of Brigadier General Kevin Turner, U.S. Army, Retired, former Deputy Chief of Chaplains for the United States Army, whose mentorship reinforced the important role chaplains play in supporting Service Members, Veterans, and their families.

The TOURS Act does not replace clinical care. It strengthens our understanding of one potential component within a broader continuum

of care. Chaplains meet Veterans where medicine and paperwork cannot, at the intersection of the heart and soul of human struggle. In my experience chaplains are often the first-person Veterans trust with their battles and the last person who would ever give up on them.

We have spent decades studying what places Veterans at risk. The TOURS Act gives us an opportunity to better understand what helps them heal.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support the TOURS Act and continue exploring every evidence-informed pathway that may strengthen resilience, improve well-being, and reduce suicide among the men and women who have served our nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

I remain Semper Fidelis.

Brandon L. Wilson