

**House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and
Memorial Affairs,
Prepared Remarks for Chairman Mark Takano
March 29th, 2022**

Today as we discuss a range of bills aimed at supporting the overall wellbeing of our nation's veterans, two bills are specifically aimed at assisting noncitizen veterans.

H.R. 1182, the *Veteran Deportation Prevention and Reform Act*, seeks to prevent noncitizen veterans from being deported, improve tracking of noncitizen veterans as they are processed through the immigration system, and repatriate any eligible deported veterans back to the country they have fought so hard to defend. The bill aims to identify the number of deported or deportable veterans, coordinate federal efforts to ensure that these individuals receive due credit for their military service during any immigration proceedings, establish new protocols for the fair treatment and consideration of these servicemembers, and provide a better pathway to citizenship for applicants of good moral character.

The second bill I will be discussing today to assist noncitizen servicemembers and their families is H.R. 1183, the *Honoring the Oath Act*. Under this bill, DHS would be directed to establish a Military Family Immigration Advisory committee that would provide recommendations on whether an individual should be granted a stay of removal, deferred action, parole, or ultimately be removed from the country. In essence, it gives a fighting chance to those who have served our country and are now facing deportation.

The Department of Defense (DOD) stated that between fiscal years 2013 and 2018, roughly 44,000 noncitizens served in our Armed Forces alone. Many noncitizen veterans return from deployment and subsequently live with mental conditions related to their service, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This disorder typically triggers issues with substance abuse as a means of escape. Many veterans choose a path of substance abuse to cope with the symptoms of their disorder, which directly stem from their military service. Other issues such as aggression, anxiety and thoughts of suicide can plague a veteran upon separation from service and can directly land veterans in legal trouble and on a pathway to deportation.

When incidents with law enforcement occur with a citizen veteran living with a mental disorder, such as PTSD, here in America, we have a robust network of justice involved veteran treatment courts to ensure they receive fair consideration and weight to their service to this country. Congress has passed a multitude of laws opening access to care and services for veterans living with invisible wounds of war and ensuring consideration on mental disabilities is given when these veterans apply for benefits. We must afford noncitizen veterans facing deportation this same opportunity. When these veterans are removed from the country, they lose access to many of the necessary services available to them in the US. Those that have been deported and exiled from the country they defended and now not only deal with the trauma of removal but also face significant challenges and barriers when trying to access the benefits they are entitled to under the law. Benefits they earned defending our country.

Congress must work with the Biden Administration to remedy these grave injustices and prevent future unjust deportations from occurring while ensuring deported veterans have access to their earned benefits. These bills present fresh opportunities for this Congress and the American people to thank them for their service by offering new remedies for these veterans.

I look forward to the discussion of how these bills will improve the lives of the veterans that have worn the uniform of our nation. I am also thankful to Representatives Vargas and Grijalva for their collaboration on this issue.

I am thankful to have this opportunity to testify and shed light on the importance of these bills.

Thank you and I yield back.