



Special Operations Association of America

October 20, 2023

Statement for the Record
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
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House Committee on Veterans Affairs
364 Cannon Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515



The Special Operations Association of America (SOAA) is a 501c19 Veteran Service Organization (VSO) located in Washington, D.C. that advocates for Special Operations Forces (SOF) and their families; commissions research on issues that affect SOF members; and, cultivates an engaged community of Active Duty and Veteran SOF and their families.

SOAA's mission is to provide sustained advocacy, research, education initiatives, and community building to ensure the success of the SOF community and their families.

Executive Director, David Cook

Mr. Cook is the Executive Director of the Special Operations Association of America (SOAA), which is a Veterans Service Organization (VSO) dedicated to legislation and policy advocacy on behalf of all men and women in the Special Operations community and their families. SOAA's mission is to be *"a voice for all members of the Special Operations community,"* on and off Capitol Hill, in order to ensure mission success and support for those that bear the greater burden.

In his role at SOAA, Mr. Cook frequently engages leaders of US Allies, the U.S. Congress, the White House, US Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and other key stakeholders in the USSOCOM and Intelligence community on behalf of the SOF community.

Mr. Cook is a subject matter expert on Special Operations, national security, sensitive activities, military transition, preservation of the force and family, suicide prevention, military and veteran healthcare, and military and veteran postsecondary benefits.

Mr. Cook is a currently serving Psychological Operations soldier in the US Army Reserve, and proud recipient of multiple military awards and decorations.

Prior to serving with SOAA, Mr. Cook served for a decade on active duty in the US Army in both conventional and special operations units where he led small teams in combat zones and Embassy environments. Most recently, Mr. Cook served as a professional staff member for Congressman Darrell Issa focused on Foreign Affairs, emerging technology, and national security. Mr. Cook currently consults for all Department of Defense (DOD) service components in artificial intelligence and open source intelligence.

Dear Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano,

H.R. 1753, The "Jax" Act.

On behalf of our members of the Special Operations community and their families, we thank you for this opportunity to provide a statement for the record regarding the pending, bipartisan legislation HR 1753, The "Jax" Act.

The Global War on Terror made heavy use of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in combatting terrorist groups. However, SOF units predominantly operated in the Middle East & North Africa region where there is great sensitivity towards men speaking with women. Their inability to communicate with the female half of the population soon presented an enormous intelligence and trust-building gap.



Recognizing this gap, in 2009, Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan called upon U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to implement women servicemembers into Special Operations Forces. This was despite current Department of Defense policy that prohibited women servicemembers from participating in combat roles, which policy was only reversed four years later in 2013. It took less than a year before U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) directed Tasking Orders for the Cultural Support Team (CST) Program to U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC). The CST Program then transitioned to recruiting from the total-force under Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

Graduates of the CST Selection and veterans of the CST Program were issued the Skill Identifier D5K or R2J from USASOC or JSOC, respectively, though CST veterans did not receive any further indication of being a SOF combat veteran on their DD Form 214, nor any Additional Skill Identifier (ASI) to correspond with their original Military Occupational Skill school (MOS), which MOS were all non-combat roles.

While recognized for their contributions to Village Stability Operations, it is not widely known that CST veterans' service included Direct Action Operations. They are SOF combat veterans who fought and died in the Global War on Terror. These women veterans earned the same combat badges and incurred the same hardships as their male battle-buddies, but do not receive the same care from VA.

The Special Operations Association of America strongly supports HR 1753 for identifying the idiosyncratic problem pervading the CST veteran community, which is a lack of clear documentation of the ad-hoc CST program, coupled with a lack of clear identification of these women veterans' status as SOF combat veterans, to sufficiently support the service-connection nexus of these women veterans' claims.

Further, we applaud the Jax Act for offering a solution to this problem on behalf of these women SOF veterans, viz., to supply definitive service records of approximately 300 CST Veterans to the Department of Veterans Affairs, to re-open CSTs' previously denied claims for the Department of Veterans Affairs to review with these updated data, and to determine if the Department of Veterans Affairs' made a Clear and Unmistakable Error (CUE) in the denial of service-connected disability and treatment.

The Special Operations Association of America strongly supports HR 1753, The Jax Act, for succinctly and easily addressing and rectifying the issues preventing women veterans of the CST program from accessing the benefits they earned or the care they deserve, and look forward to working with this Committee and your colleagues in the Senate to solve this problem once and for all.

H.R. 3790, the "Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2023"

Currently, under title 38, an increased payment of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is awarded to a surviving spouse upon the death of a veteran who is intitled to disability compensation and who is rated total and permanent for a period of eight years immediately preceding death. Veterans who are diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, have an average life expectancy of 2 -5 years. Because of the aggressiveness of this disease, most veterans will not live long enough for their surviving spouse to receive this increased payment.

SOAA supports H.R. 3790 because it solves this oversight in statute by amending Section 1311(a)(2) to remove the eight-year requirement in cases where the veteran passes away from ALS. This is common



sense legislation will provide access to a benefit for the families of the approximately 5,000 who are diagnosed and die from ALS each year. SOAA strongly supports this legislation.

H.R. 4016, the “Veteran Fraud Reimbursement Act”

When it is determined that a veteran no longer possesses the mental capacity to manage his or her VA disability compensation payment, a fiduciary is assigned. VA is tasked with maintaining oversight of the use of those funds by the fiduciary. Under current statute, VA is only required to reissue misused funds in cases where VA negligently failed to identify the misuse. By no fault of their own, veterans who are victims of fund misuse by their fiduciary are not made whole when VA fails to properly monitor and identify misuse.

SOAA believes that by amending paragraph 6107 of title 38, H.R. 4016 addresses this issue by ordering the Secretary of VA to pay the amount of misused funds to the beneficiary or the beneficiary’s newly appointed fiduciary. Veterans should not be penalized for the actions or inaction of those who are entrusted to care for them. SOAA supports this legislation.

H.R. 4190, the “Restoring Benefits to Defrauded Veterans Act”

SOAA supports H.R. 4190 because there is no provision in law that allows the Secretary of VA to repay the estate of a diseased veteran in cases where there is misuse of funds by his or her fiduciary and that misuse is identified after the death of the veteran. This legislation will mandate the Secretary of VA to repay the estate of the deceased Veteran the amount of misused funds. SOAA supports this legislation.

David Cook

Executive Director

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