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Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
FY 2020 Member Day Testimony

Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz, Ranking Member Carter, and members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to provide input on the FY 2020 Appropriations process on behalf of the residents of California's 39th Congressional District.

As a Navy veteran with the honor of representing over 25,000 veterans, the programs under your jurisdiction are important to me, and especially important to them and their families. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight just a few examples of the top priorities from my district.

First, I urge you to provide increased funding for the Veterans State Cemetery Grant program in order to support a veterans cemetery in Orange County. With 3.19 million residents, Orange County has a disproportionately high population of veterans. However, it does not have a single veterans cemetery. Local veterans have been campaigning for a veterans cemetery for years, but the federal government has failed to rise to the occasion. While local entities are pursuing a state veterans cemetery, federal funding should be made available in order to get this project across the finish line. I urge you to increase the VA's State Cemetery Grant program funding to ensure this long overdue project does not suffer any further delays.

I urge the Committee to continue to support the VetSuccess On Campus (VSOC) program. I have heard from many constituents who have benefited from the VSOC program at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, CA, as they transition from military service to academic life. VSOC

counselors understand the unique challenges that face veteran students and are able to quickly resolve problems that our veteran students face. Increased funding will allow this valuable program to reach more veteran students by expanding it to additional campuses.

I encourage you to provide strong funding for VA homeless assistance programs. While substantial progress has been made in reducing the number of homeless veterans nationally, sustained funding is still needed. This includes the highly effective Supportive Services for Veterans Families Program. Volunteers of America in Orange County uses this funding to provide hundreds of veterans in the region who are at risk with rapid rehousing and assistance obtaining benefits.

I appreciate this committee's support and commitment to combatting veterans suicide and urge you to provide strong funding levels for veteran suicide and outreach programs. Veterans in my district are still absorbing the loss of one of our greatest champions, a veteran who served in the 70's and 80's, led a successful career, and then just last year, took his own life. This is just one local manifestation of a national tragedy. Increased funding for both prevention programs and research will save lives and make a dramatic difference in the lives of veterans and the people they touch.

I strongly support the VA caregivers program and urge you to provide the highest possible funding to provide services to qualified veterans and their caregivers. In my district, my office was approached by a mother caring for her son, an Army and Marine Corps veteran and single dad to three kids, whose injuries while deployed in Iraq led to memory problems, a 100%

disability rating, and a non-employable designation from the VA. His mom must take care of her son full time, yet her application to the program has been denied twice. Sufficient funds must be provided to ensure we provide support to veterans and families like these.

Finally, I want to thank Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz for your steadfast commitment to opposing the President's proposal to divert badly needed military construction funding to build an unnecessary and ineffective wall on the southern border.

The consequences of this strategy are particularly stark in my region. The 146th Airlift Wing at the Air National Guard Station at Channel Islands in Southern California is often called upon to help fight wildfires. To enhance their training and readiness to carryout critical search and rescue and wildfire suppression missions, the 146th is soon expecting \$8 million for a flight simulator program. But timely funding of this program is now in doubt. Diverting funds to address real emergencies like wildfire and search and rescue missions in order to pay for the President's border wall would be a gross injustice.

Additionally, the Los Alamitos Army Airfield near my district desperately needs sustainment and maintenance dollars. The Airfield has the longest runway in Orange County and a full-time base population of over 800. As the Command Headquarters for California's Office of Emergency Services, it is the logistical hub for disaster response for Southern California. But the facility has major unmet maintenance needs, including pavement degradation of the runways and taxiways and airfield lighting outages. It would be unconscionable if we can't get emergency supplies where they needed to go because of unavailable funds for basic maintenance.

Nationwide, there is demonstrated need for increased resources for military construction projects, not cuts – and unauthorized wall funding should not exacerbate these problems.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I know you have a tough job ahead of you, but I hope you will keep these stories in mind as you craft the FY 2020 Appropriations Act for Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies.