



**Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz**  
**Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, & Related Agencies**  
**FY 2020 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, & Related Agencies Markup**  
**May 1, 2019**

This meeting of the subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies will come to order. Today, we are considering the fiscal year 2020 funding for the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies bill. This bill highlights our continued commitment to our servicemembers and their families and to our Veterans. We can all be proud of the work we did together to produce this bill, which takes into account the requests and feedback that all of you, and our colleagues on and off the Committee, have given us. We have worked closely with your staffs to address any issues and to produce a bill that reflects the priorities of all Members in this House.

Prior to the beginning of our budget hearings, we endeavored to dive deeper into the issues that each of our agencies struggle with and that have faced neglect for too long. We held a hearing on quality of life issues for our military, which focused primarily on the substandard conditions revealed in privatized housing across the branches of our military. We held a hearing on women Veteran's health, on mental health, and whole health as treatment for PTSD and other issues, and to address suicide prevention. We focused on the Veteran homeless population and we had a subcommittee hearing with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to discuss a broad range of issues in addition to the regular budget hearing with the Secretary. These deeper dives allowed us all to get a better sense of the needs that exist, and I think they helped us produce a better product. Thank you for your attendance and participation, particularly with as many competing priorities as we all have.

The bill makes needed investments in the programs that improve our military readiness and provides the benefits and medical care that our Veterans have earned because of their service to our Nation. Specifically, the FY 2020 Committee recommendation provides 108.1 billion dollars which includes 921 million dollars for Overseas Contingency Operations and 2 billion dollars in emergency funding to address Hurricane damage in North Carolina and Florida. This is a 10 billion dollar increase above the FY 2019 enacted funding level and 6.1 billion dollars below the FY 2020 budget request.

The bill provides 10.5 billion dollars for Military Construction, an increase of 207 million dollars above the FY 2019 enacted level and 702.7 million dollars below the FY 2020 budget request. The Committee recommendation provides 1.4 billion dollars for Family Housing Construction which is 140.8 million dollars above the FY 2020 budget request. The additional 140.8 million dollars is for housing support costs associated with housing issues on multiple military installations. The Committee recommendation funds the Energy Resilience and Conservation Investment Program at 190 million

dollars, which is 40 million dollars above the request. The Committee mark provides 1.1 billion dollars for unfunded priorities that were approved by the DOD Comptroller. These projects are at more than 35 percent design and can be executed during FY 2020.

A total of 217.5 billion dollars is provided for the FY 2020 programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, of which 94.3 billion dollars is discretionary funding, which is 7.8 billion dollars above the FY 2019 enacted level and 1.3 billion dollars above the FY 2020 budget request. As you can see we are making a big investment in VA – as I mentioned we are above both the FY 2019 enacted level and the FY 2020 budget request. The bill funds VA medical care at 80.4 billion dollars – providing for approximately seven million patients to be treated in fiscal year 2020.

Within this total, funding includes: 582 million dollars for gender-specific care for women; \$1.9 billion for homeless assistance programs; \$397 million for opioid abuse prevention; and \$270 million in rural health initiatives. Medical and Prosthetic Research is 840 million dollars, which is 61 million dollars above the FY 2019 enacted level and 78 million dollars above the budget request. The bill provides 9.4 billion dollars in mental healthcare services and 222 million dollars in suicide prevention outreach activities. In addition, this funding will support a number of initiatives to remove barriers to mental healthcare and reduce the stigma of seeking treatment, as well as putting an emphasis on PTSD research and treatment, firearm safety for veterans, and supporting the Veterans Crisis Line.

Other areas of interest to Members that we focus on in the VA title are the “whole health” model, ensuring access and care for veterans in rural and underserved areas including telehealth, and improving treatment of conditions like rare cancers and pressure ulcers. This funding ensures that VA can meet the medical needs of our Veterans and strengthen its focus on other vital areas. One last VA item I would like to note is that the bill provides \$1 billion for infrastructure improvements, allocating 850 million dollars for seismic corrections, and 150 million dollars for minor construction. If we want to keep Veterans in the system we must ensure that VA has modern, safe facilities to see these Veterans.

Finally, the bill provides an increase of 33 percent over the fiscal year 2019 enacted level for the four Related Agencies under this bill: the American Battle Monuments Commission, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, Arlington National Cemetery, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home. This funding will allow these agencies to maintain service levels and invest in needed maintenance and improvement projects. Additionally, the bill provides the last installment of funds for the anticipated cost of Arlington Cemetery’s Southern Expansion project, which will help extend the life of the cemetery into the 2050 timeframe.

Finally, as a surprise to no one this bill does not fund a border wall, nor allow the president to bypass congressional intent and divert valuable military construction funding from previously approved national security projects. Whether we agree or disagree on the need for a wall or whether or not there is a crisis at the border, I hope this Committee can agree that funds for wall should not be stolen from previously approved vital military construction projects that are to a dollar, higher priority than any wall.

As I have said throughout this process, Military construction dollars should be used only for the purpose they are provided, which is to support the Department of Defense's mission, servicemembers, and their families. It is important to point out, particularly for the new Members of the Subcommittee, that Milcon only makes up 3 percent of total Defense funds so all dollars are valuable. We can debate the merits of a border wall but let's reserve that for consideration during Homeland Security bill.

With that, I want to thank all our Subcommittee Members for their engagement during the hearing process and during the process of drafting this legislation. I also want to thank my partner, Judge Carter, for his work on these issues. I am proud to have you as our Ranking Member on this Subcommittee. I also want to thank Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger for their support for the Subcommittee's work. This is a good bill that will help our servicemembers, their families, and our Veterans, and I urge all our Members to support it.