

**US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

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**TESTIMONY OF HON. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY**

**MARCH 29<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, and Members of the Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am asking the Committee to consider including two of my bills, the *Never Forgotten Korean War POW Act* and the *Know Your Vets Act*, in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). These bills address two specific problems with how our government cares for the brave men and women of the uniformed services after they have returned from combat. I represent the United States Military Academy at West Point as well as thousands of military families both active and retired. I have engaged this community through my Veterans Advisory Board which has been instrumental in the creation of this legislation. Our responsibility to honor those who are willing to sacrifice everything does not end when they return home and I appreciate the hard work the Members of this Committee do in that regard.

KNOW YOUR VETS ACT

One of the main issues I hear about from members of my Veterans Advisory Board is the difficulty many servicemembers face during the transition back to civilian life. My bill, the *Know Your Vets Act*, would help smooth that transition by giving veterans the option to have their discharge paperwork sent to their local Veterans Services Officer (VSO). This notification would

allow VSOs to proactively reach out to offer assistance and ensure the new veteran has a smooth transition back to civilian life. Many veterans struggle with finding jobs, adjusting to family life, or just feeling at home in the civilian world. Some battle mental health or substance abuse issues. Currently, VSOs have no way of knowing that a recently discharged veteran has returned home or moved to their community. This means that veterans must reach out proactively on their own to access resources, which can be a barrier to getting the help they need.

The *Know Your Vets Act* would address this issue by giving veterans the option of having the Department of Defense send their Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty Form, also known as DD-214 form, to the county VSO in the county to which they are moving. This will allow VSOs to reach out and offer their assistance with the transition including accessing services and connecting with the local veterans community. By allowing the veterans to opt-in, their privacy will be protected if they do not wish to have their information transmitted. This bill is a simple fix which will offer these American heroes an easier transition back to civilian life.

I wrote this bill in close consultation with my Veterans Advisory Board which includes Stephanie Keegan, the mother of Daniel Keegan who died shortly after he transitioned out of the military. Daniel's mother, Stephanie, believes that this tragedy could have been prevented if Daniel had help navigating the process and connecting with the local community from a local official, like a VSO. My bill will help to prevent more stories like Daniel's by giving others in his position better, more streamlined, access to the help they need.

NEVER FORGOTTEN KOREAN WAR POW ACT

After working alongside Korean War veteran and prisoner of war (POW) Corporal Raymond Mellin of Cornwall, New York, in my district, I drafted the *Never Forgotten Korean War POW Act* to retroactively eliminate a unique and arbitrary three-month limit on combat pay eligibility for Korean War POWs. Corporal Ray Mellin was a POW for 37 months, but his time in an enemy prison wasn't recognized in the way it should have been and he did not receive fair compensation for his time in an enemy prison camp.

The Combat Duty Pay Act of 1952 established combat pay for the United States military. Although POWs from the Korean War did qualify for combat pay, the law instituted an arbitrary three-month limit on their eligibility. The Never Forgotten Korean War POW Act would strike the language which includes the limit and retroactively adjust the rate of pay to be consistent with inflation. This will make sure that those who served are fairly compensated and never forgotten.

We have the opportunity to rectify this injustice and I would urge the Committee to include my legislation in the NDAA.

## CONCLUSION

To close, I again want to thank for the Committee's time and attention to these two important issues today. I would be pleased to respond to questions you or the other Members of the Committee may have. The brave men and women I represent appreciate your leadership on these issues and respect for their service.