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COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND
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**Representative Max Rose - Testimony to the House Armed Services
Committee**

Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Thornberry, thank you for hearing this testimony today, and for your leadership.

I appreciate this opportunity to come before you, not only because my first hand understanding of military service as a U.S. Army veteran, but because my district--Staten Island and South Brooklyn--has one of the most vibrant veteran and active duty communities in the nation.

And when I see a huge portion of my district is not being allocated equitable benefits, I need to speak up and make sure this committee is aware.

Staten Island has the highest percentage of veterans in New York City relative to borough population, a number almost twice that of the percentage of veterans in Manhattan and Queens. And the largest Coast Guard operational field command on the East Coast, the U.S. Coast Guard Sector New York, has their main staff right at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island's North Shore.

Currently veterans on Staten Island are receiving hundreds of dollars less in Basic Allowance for Housing, or BAH, than any of New York City's other four boroughs. And it is the only borough--the ONLY borough--to be separated into its own military housing area. This is inexcusable and needs to be remedied.

BAH is allocated to assist service members cover the cost of housing in the private sector, or the local economy. Recent rental data shows that Staten Island is not exempt from the rising cost of housing in New York City. But our BAH does not accurately reflect these prices. And who suffers -- our service members and our veterans. I bring this to your attention because Staten Islanders have repeatedly felt forgotten--as data is being collected by the Department of Defense to assess BAH rates for 2020, this body should show the veterans and service members on Staten Island the recognition that they deserve.

As you know, BAH is also distributed to veteran students through the Post-9/11 GI Bill. I have heard from several veteran students and university officials about a galling \$600 dollars more in BAH received if these vets attend school not on Staten Island, but just across the bridge in Brooklyn.

Census data shows that the difference in median rents between Brooklyn and Staten Island is just \$85 dollars. These numbers aren't adding up, and to be clear, New York City is one of the most expensive cities in the world for renters. That is reflected in the BAH for Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx, but not for Staten Island.

I ask Committee Members to include in their NDAA report language a directive for DoD to confer with the veteran stakeholders on Staten Island when they make these assessments -- to talk to the locals who are affected most, not only our brave service members, but also our veteran students. Finally, I urge the Committee to direct DoD to adjust New York City's Military Housing Area to include Staten Island, equalizing BAH rates--Staten Island is a part of New York City, and that should never be called into question.

This is an issue about fairness for the servicemembers and veterans who call Staten Island home. And as I know the Members on the Committee agree, these issues that matter to our constituents are the issues that need our attention the most.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I look forward to working with you all going forward.