

Statement for the Record - Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin (MI-08)
House Veterans Affairs Health Subcommittee | Legislative Hearing - Solid Start Act
October 13, 2021 | 2:00 PM

- Chairwoman Brownley, Ranking Member Bergman, distinguished members of the Health Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record regarding my bill, H.R. 2819, the Solid Start Act.
- This bipartisan bill requires the VA to connect with veterans during their first year of transitioning out of service to ensure that they are aware of the benefits and resources available to them.
- First, I want to thank the leadership of the House Veterans Affairs Committee and the Health Subcommittee for their commitment to addressing mental health and suicide concerns for our veterans.
- Second, I'd like to thank my Veterans Advisory Board and all of the other stakeholders in my district that have helped to craft the bill we are discussing here today.
- And finally, thank you to the countless veterans and veteran families across my district who have shared their experiences with me and given me direct feedback about how we can better serve them, here on the House Veterans Affairs Committee.
- For example, Josh, an Iraq War veteran from my district, has repeatedly shared with me and my team the statistic that nearly 40% of veterans in Michigan are unconnected to the VA resources to which they are entitled.
- This statistic, coupled with his own experience in navigating the challenging bureaucracy of the VA after his active duty service concluded, is unacceptable.

- Every veteran I meet has a story about their transition out of the military. Whether it has been 3 years or 3 decades, veterans have told me about the challenges they faced transitioning back to civilian life.
- I watched it up close with my husband, when he left the military after 30 years in the Army.
- Newly separated veterans encounter changes in job status, lifestyle, housing, health care, and location. It's a period of enormous change.
- Veterans are entitled to a variety of resources to help them with these challenges and I know the impact that these benefits and services can have -- from mental health counseling through the VA and its partners, to employment and resume assistance through the Jobs for Veterans State Grant, to accessing education benefits through the G.I. Bill and Vocational Rehabilitation -- these are all essential benefits that veterans should be aware of.
- But these resources can only benefit our veterans if they know about them.
- That's why I introduced the Solid Start Act with my friend, Congressman Joyce. This bipartisan bill codifies a pilot program that the VA started to address this issue, which has shown great promise.
- My bill is specifically aimed at engaging veterans in their first year transitioning out of service. It requires the VA to reach out to veterans three times in their first year after separating from the military, to tell them about the benefits they are eligible for.
- This way, we make sure they actually know about the existing programs and resources that are there to help them, including resources specific to women veterans and information on state and local resources.

- It shouldn't be up to veterans to navigate the bureaucracy at the Department of Veterans Affairs at the same moment they're trying to adjust to civilian life.
- It is our responsibility to honor our veterans not just with words, but with action.
- I believe this proactive outreach will have a tremendous impact on the mental health of our veterans and I look forward to working with this subcommittee to advance this important, bipartisan bill. Thank you.