

## PUBLIC HEARING

CHAIRPERSON: Representative Dorinda  
Borer, Senator James  
Maroney

SENATORS: Abrams, Logan, Anwar,  
Berthel, Leone, Osten.

REPRESENTATIVES: Boyd, Vail, Ferraro,  
Napoli, Rose, Wood,  
Yaccarino, Zullo.

REP. BORER (115TH): I'm Representative Borer, co-chair, with my Senator James Maroney, and I'd first like to read our safety announcement, which is in the interest of safety. I would ask you to note the location and access to the exits to the hearing room, there's two, there's two there. The two doors through which you entered the room are the emergency exits and are marked with Exit signs. In the event of an emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, proceed to the main stairs or follow the exit signs to one of the fire stairs. Please quickly exit the building and follow any instructions the Capitol Police provide to you. Do not delay and do not return unless you and until you are advised that it is safe to do so. In the event of a lockdown announcement, please remain in the hearing room, stay away from the exit doors and seek concealment behind desks and chairs until an all-clear announcement is heard. Thank you. Okay, we have a lot of great bills that we're going to listen to today and get public feedback on but we're going to start right off with Major General Evon.

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MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Good afternoon committee co-chairs, Senator Maroney, Representative Borer and distinguished members of the Veterans' Committee. It's again my pleasure to testify before you today regarding the one remaining Military Department Bill that has been submitted during the short session. House Bill 5397 is an act concerning the organizational structure and bylaws of the militia units and the maximum retirement age for members serving as mu, excuse me, as musicians in bands of the Governor's Foot Guard. This bill like the other floor agency bills, simply serves to clarify current statutory language and ensure the proper and efficient operation of the Armed Forces of the state, which I - under my charge.

First the proposal seeks to update obsolete statutory language concerning the figuration and administration of military units of the Armed Forces. This provision will eliminate an obsolete and antiquated requirement for units of the Armed Forces of the state to create bylaws basically prior to the 20TH century military units across the nation where often governed by bylaws created by the unit and then approved by higher level commanders. However, for the last century, the military is governed by uniform regulations that apply equally to all units within a particular service or a command. This uniformity allows greater consistency by the commanders. If passed into law, this proposal will allow the Governor to configure and administer state military units in a manner consistent with federal military units to ensure their continuity and utility in the present day and well into the future. The second part of the bill raises the maximum major military service for

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members of the bands of the First and Second Company Governor's Foot Guard to age 70.

As many of you know, the four companies of the Governor's Guard are part-time, part of the Armed Forces of the state along with the Connecticut State Guard and the National Guard and currently the maximum major service for all elements of the Armed Forces of the state including the National Guard is 64. This bill serves to support the recruiting and retention efforts of the two Foot Guard companies and their bands by allowing the musicians in the bands of each company to continue in service until age 70. The average age, what we've seen over time of the Governor's Guard, has steadily increased and the current membership has expressed a desire to raise the maximum age to age 70, so the age increase will afford new or current members the opportunity to continue to serve in the State Militia in a capacity that's less arduous without detriment to the readiness of the state's military forces.

Also, in reference to other bills that you'll discuss today, that are being raised, I would ask and also like to take this opportunity to extend my support to House Bill 5396, an act concerning the military training evaluation conducted by the Labor Department. That bill extends the time period that a veteran may submit an application to the department to consider their military training for credit for all or part of the term of an apprenticeship program registered within the department. The bill increases the time period from 2-5 years from a veteran's date of discharger. Any consideration of military training in licensing or education requirements supports the military's recruiting mission, so we're definitely in support

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of that. In addition, I'd like to briefly comment on House Bill 5398, which is an act concerning the licensed occupations of military spouses.

This bill contains some concepts that are also proposed in the Governor's Bill, SB13, an act expanding economic opportunity and licensed occupations but is less expansive than the Governor's Bill. Both bills seek to ease the burden on military spouses who hold an occupational license from another state in acquiring the same occupational license in Connecticut. Military spouse license for reciprocity has long been an initiative of DOD and I think they've annually come to meet with this committee or members of the committee, and it contributes to the service members quality-of-life and also retention. So we support any bill that helps ease the burden of our families, as the families are an integral part of the equation that we call military service, so they may not have volunteered to serve but they were drafted, however, to have being associated with their service member. So, thank you again for your time today and your consideration, and I'm happy to address any questions that you might have. Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Yes, Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you Madam Chair. Good afternoon. General Evon, um, in regard to raising the age from 64 to 70, um, I was just curious as to why 70 and why have an age limit at all. If someone's capable, why would we want to even restrict it at all to be part of the band, even that age if they're capable at age 71-72, um, I just wonder why the age of 70 was chosen.

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MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Yes, so we debated actually between 68 and 70. I'd say that when we - the discussions above the age 70, um, went to a liability to the state. So, if the - if the band members were injured, they were covered by Workers Comp, so most of the debate revolved around the liability that we could incur potentially, if they were injured. You know, it could be as simple as, you know, marching in a parade, St. Patrick's Day parade or otherwise. So that was really some of the pushback.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And again, I certainly support that concept but to me someone - there could be a 72-year-old in much better shape than a 54-year-old. I just - I'd be willing to eliminate that age bracket all together but would have concerns of that more from a liability standpoint?

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Um, [Crosstalk]

REP. VAIL (52ND): I didn't mean to put you on the spot, but I was just curious.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: I mean, when we compared to the federal side, there is always a mandatory removal date, so there's always a limit to service even if the [Crosstalk].

REP. VAIL (52ND): I just - if we do this now and that extends it six years just for band members?

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Right.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Um, I just don't want to be here again three years from now and then again someone who's going to be 71 wants to expand it to 74 and then were 78 and so on and so forth, you know, so. Maybe we can have it - I definitely support the

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concept and I'll support this bill but I'm certainly willing to extend that out if there is anyway that we could do that just to keep us from being here again in a few years.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Okay.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you. And I'd just like to make, if I can, with your permission. There's a lot of public hearings going on today, so you're going to see a lot of Representatives and Senators coming in and out of here. It doesn't mean that it isn't important. I personally have three public hearings simultaneous right now, um, so you're going to see people coming in. Everybody is here in the building and definitely cares about what you have to say. We're definitely going to review this stuff, so. I just wanted to make that statement. Thank you for your indulgence.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you Representative Vail and thank you for pointing that out. Anybody else need to comment? Senator Maroney.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much for being here today General. I have a question about HB 5398 for the military spouses. Approximately how many families do we see moving in each year that this will impact?

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: So for the Connecticut National Guard it's a lot less than lets say, what we see down in Gratton sub-base, so I don't have the numbers, but I could say, for instance, if we - we're fly C130 right now. Some of the oldest planes in the inventory. If we get to a point in time and hopefully sooner than later, we get upgraded to the newer planes, that would open the door for other, so

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retiring Air Force members in this case to come to the Connecticut Air Guard, you know, and to make the state more, you know, friendly to the spouses. So if a spouse male or female had a license, I think that this would go a long way in completing the package so both the spouse and the husband coming to fly for the Connecticut Guard, you know they'd take care, because when we - honestly we compete with other states. So, if it's easier, more efficient to get a license or a license is recognized here in Connecticut that makes us on par with, you know, probably half a dozen different states actually, if that makes sense.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH) Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you Madam Chair and thank you General for being here and your testimony. I support your initiative especially 5396 for the specialty job training. We passed that a few years ago, the two years. I always felt that wasn't enough. You need a, your know, four or five years, so I would hope this body would adopt that because you come home and your not sometimes ready to get right back into a steady workforce or it takes a year or so just to get reacclimated, so I think the five years makes a lot of sense. You - you already have the training. Every specialist you sought is to have some test for the Department of Labor making it benefits the veteran and our society in the job market. So I think we should look hard and serious at this and I'm sure we will as a bipartisan group to support 5396, and as far as the age, I sort of agree with Representative Vail but it's been hard enough to get to 70, we haven't even got to 70, so I

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think we at least we should start with 70 and go from there in Foot Guard. So, that's it and thank you for everything you do.

REP. BORER (115TH): Representative Rose.

REP. ROSE (118TH): Thank you Madam Chair. Good afternoon General. [Crosstalk] Thank you for being here. I agree with Representative Vail as far as the age, and we all have kids and we're getting them through high school when their 18, their 17 one day and they have a birthday and the next day their 18 and now the school won't talk to you because supposedly they grew up overnight. Is there anyway that we can perhaps tie it to a physical. You know, I mean like Representative Vail says, I know 50 year old's that are probably in worse shape than a 70 year old and, you know, if they could prove to a physical medical appointment, that they're still fit to serve, you know, could that maybe be something we considered?

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: We can definitely consider it. I think a start point would be age 70 and then we'd probably have to readdress at this point. That makes sense, absolutely.

REP. BORER (115TH): Anyone else? I'm glad we are looking at increasing the age, right, 70 is the new 50 or whatever. [laughing] As I get older it becomes, you know, a little, um. It sounds like there is a lot of good conversation on what that number should be. Personally, I believe there should be a cutoff because that's a very difficult conversation to have with somebody who has served so long, right. At some point, where you recognize there are signs where it may be, shouldn't be fulfilling the duty. It's hard to ask them to step

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aside and if you have a cutoff, I think that makes it a little easier. Seventy might sound like it's a little low although we're following the Federal guideline, so that's something that the committee can discuss. And then the other thing, I just wanted to address, 5398 on the license occupational for the military spouses, and I think we do need to do what we can for military families who are already burdened especially those that are coming in to Connecticut. We don't want them to have an economic disadvantage.

I know that the Governor's Bill, which is being heard in General Law is a little bit more broad but I think at some point we need to start narrowing that down because while we do want to have reciprocity we also want to have, make sure whoever is getting that license knows Connecticut's codes and regulations and certainly, um, sometimes we're a little tighter with our regulations here in Connecticut and because were safe, we just want to make sure that there is no opportunity for someone to come in and not necessarily know our rules. Right, so I think it's a good bill. The bill in General Law is a good bill, and we need to kind of get our arms around exactly what occupations would make sense to have reciprocity on. In 2018, we had reciprocity for teacher certifications for military spouses coming in and I think we need to expand that.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Thank you very much.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Thank you very much.

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REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, we're going to alternate between our Department of Defense, our representatives and the public and just to remind the members, all members speaking that there is a three minute limit to our public speaking, and our next speaker is Elizabeth Gara. Elizabeth, did I say it right, Elizabeth Gara? Okay. Then our next speaker is Randy Collins.

RANDY COLLINS: Good afternoon, my name is Randy Collins. I'm Advocacy Manager with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. CCM statewide organization representing towns and cities. We represent all 169 towns. Unfortunately, I'm here today to oppose the speaking opposition of Senate Bill 357 and 5401, which were two eligible, one was in income eligibility for Gold Star parents. The other is House bill 5401, which is a property tax exemption for Gold Star parents.

Just in 2017, this measure passed for Gold Star parents as a municipal option. We are seeing now simply three years later that, that would take that option away from municipalities and mandate that property tax exemption and put it on to the current 77 plus mandated property tax exemptions that we already have. Look around the legislature this year, we are seeing numerous proposed property tax exemptions. Everyone of these simply just shifts that burden to the remaining taxpayers. CCM has been arguing on behalf of our member towns, the need for revenue diversification from municipalities, so we're not as reliant on aggressive and overburden property tax system and this moves us in the opposite direction. You know, and I have mentioned in the past that if this is something that the committee wants to do, would it not be more fair to

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provide this benefit as an income tax credit rather than a property tax exemption, and at that point, the entire state would share in the burden of the sacrifice that these families have made rather than then putting it on the host municipality.

These are tough issues to talk about, you know, as I said. So, um, you know but as I said, as a matter we oppose all property tax exemptions.

Unfortunately, that's why some of our most distressed municipalities have 50 percent of their property tax based is off their roles, and it makes it very hard for them and it hampers economic development and home ownership issues as we simply shift that burden onto other residents. The other bill that we wanted to raise - quickly mention was House Bill 5402, prohibiting retaliation or discrimination against an employee who is a veteran for exceeding paid sick leave.

As currently drafted, it means that if this person uses up their sick leave and then comes back by day, a week, a month, a year later, is there no means of which an employee - an employer can discipline that person. How long there - its very vague of what is discriminatory retaliation, what reasons. I mean, simply because their veteran, while I thank them for their service, you know we do need to, you know, we do have employee procedures and policies and they do need to be uniformly applied. So, as currently drafted there is some significant deterrent to that. I'm happy to answer any questions.

REP. BORER (115TH): Great, thank you for your comments. Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you Madam Chair and thank you Randy for testifying. I agree and I don't

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agree with you. I do agree - I never thought of the state income tax exemption to take the burden off the municipalities. I think maybe we need to have that discussion as a state but I always like the idea were it is permissible for municipality to make that decision, for the Mayor or the first selectman, but I do like - I have to say, I never thought of the state income exemption. I think it takes less burden off a town, but I do think these men and women desire the tax credit. Federally, they've never got the fair share of their hours. We're supposed to be honored 70 years ago and they still to this day every veteran seems to always get the short end of the stick. So, I think as a state, and didn't you - aren't you a Marine?

RANDY COLLINS: I was. I served two tours.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I just think that we need - we need to be consistent was a country and as a state instead of maybe one town does one thing, another town does another thing, so I - I do actually never gave it much thought to state income tax, both income exemption.

RANDY COLLINS: I mean - and I think fortunately, I mean, truly fortunately the number of Gold Star parents, you know, and families that are out is fortunately is relatively small. I thank God for that. You know and I think you do want to look for ways to provide, you know, to say, you know, some small way of saying thank you for that sacrifice, not thank you but honoring that sacrifice, but as we continue to sit there and its, you know it's a property tax credit for Gold Star families and then its veterans and police, and that's why we've seen that property tax. There is 77 plus property tax

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exemptions that are on the books and, you know, as I said and every year its, when you look at them individually, like all, it's just a little bit of money.

It's not that big but when you read section 1281 in the statutes, it's a fairly onerous list of towns now, and again were limited to a property tax and some small fees and fines here and there. But every time that we have that property tax base reduced, it simply says do I do services or I increase property taxes on a small business owner, on working poor that are struggling to make the taxes on their car, their homes. It's, we can't continue to erode that base and just ask if were not providing property tax relief or just shifting that burden from one pair to the another, and when it's a municipal option, which it is right now, you have these local mayors who that have said wow great. The state passes as a local option and now the hot potato's in my hands and I don't want to vote against this.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): No, I get it and that's why I have always argued that the Federal government going back to over 200 years have short changed the actually the veteran in our country and I think they have, and I think for many years, the Federal exemption has not gone up, you know, the rate where it should be. So, what happens is more burdens put on states and more states put the burden on the municipalities. At the end of the day, I think we should be as a country protecting and getting the benefits that our veterans deserve and earned, that most people don't, 98 percent of the population chose not to serve and that's their right but one or two percent do serve. So, in some way or shape or form, federal and statewide, we have to do

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something, I think. I think people earned it, but they are promised things that we don't deliver, like we should as politicians and as a government, so, [Crosstalk] and I'm not criticizing you. I think some - and I know you care; I know you deeply care. I think we need to do something as a country and as a state to take the burden maybe off the municipality, that all.

RANDY COLLINS: Yeah, I mean and I think, you know, these individual property tax exemptions that we talked about in this committee and others one, I don't think they would be as problematic if the state met it's pilot obligations, and you know, but when we have been crown a state, we're going to take this off the role, so we're going to make that up for you and then we're short changed or unfunded. It's makes it harder for each one of these small things though, again. That commitment needs to be made at all levels, you know, but we have a system right now that just, you know, it forces us to come up here and talk about, you know, to oppose not just this but unfunded mandates up and down that are, wow that's a really good idea, or like their deserving. They are but and then it falls on the other residents to have to carry that burden, and it - and it becomes harder.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I think as a body we should look at the, I don't know if its too late, the state aspect, what we should do better as a state income tax. [Crosstalk] You gave me something to think about, so.

RANDY COLLINS: Well I'll take that as a win.  
[laughing]

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REP. YACCARINO (87TH): No, that's why we have public hearings. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you Randy.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Anybody else? Yeah. Senator Leone.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you Madam Chair. Good afternoon. In your remarks regarding House Bill 5402, were as I'm looking at the bill, it just seems like there is no - there is no restrictions, there's no caps, there is nothing as to how long this sick leave policy would be, and I assume that - I would think that's the reason why you not in support of it because its just so open and vague, you could be out [Crosstalk] for months to years, whatever, and I don't think that would be a smart thing for us to do. I understand the concept. I'm supportive of the concept but I think the language would have to be tightened up on the tail-end and make sure there is a limited timeframe. I mean, because employers do have to know how to backfill their positions and you want to make sure something doesn't get taken advantage of in the wrong way. So, if we were able to do all that, would you then change your recommendations on the bill?

RANDY COLLINS: I think it would be easier if we knew what the parameters were, why they were exceeding that sick leave, how long it could be for. Um, I'd certainly take that back to our membership, and I think it would be easier to work through those issues but right now, as I said, it - if you come back in a year and then, oh wait you gave my job to somebody else. [Crosstalk] Now I'm going to sue, and you look at the repercussions of what could be discriminatory back pay. You know, there is a

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number of different things that can hammer, what is discrimination. I mean, as I said, yeah, I gave your job away because you were gone for a year. Um, so - and I think what I was - I've had some conversations briefly outside that was maybe for VA appointments. I mean, I think we would also want to see what you can exceed that sick leave for if you want to go to a Rascal Flatt's concert. [laughing] You know, country singer.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Right, I think a lot more details would need to be incorporated [Crosstalk] for this bill to have any leg so, and I think that raising it, that gives us something to work with, so. Thank you for that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Anybody else? We heard a bill last week on a study for tax exemption for veterans and I think, you know, it's a good opportunity for us to really get our arms around all exemptions who should receive exemptions and what type of exemptions. So, you gave us a lot of information and a lot of food for thought. So, we appreciate that and when we do have that study and hopefully were going to have that study, it'd be great if CCM was at the table.

RANDY COLLINS: We would take it and we would be honored to participate. We, CCM currently is having among a membership and other parties' kind of a comprehensive property tax reform working group. Not looking to rule anything out this session but looking at ways holistically because again we see every year motor vehicle taxes are, you know. We can't address the property tax when its, you know, this piece here or there. It has to be looked at in terms of, you know, where the cost saving, where can

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we find efficiency, where can we regionalize services. You know, all aspects of municipal government to take that burden off of the property tax. Vets are securing small businesses, you know. The brick and mortar guys have such a hard time competing against the online because they're not paying those property taxes, and then every time we get these different costs, we have no choice but, as I said, we either cut services or we raise property taxes and then at a certain point where people are at I can't pay anymore, you know, especially small businesses.

REP. BORER (115TH): And, it's a tough balance between shall and may, right, so when we have a bill and we say shall, that restricts municipalities and I'm not necessarily referring to this just bill, just tax exemption in general, but when we make it optional typically the municipalities that can afford it, will do it and those that can't won't and those are typically the population that need it the most.

RANDY COLLINS: Right.

REP. BORER (115TH): Right, so thank you for your testimony and we look forward to working with you in the future. Thank you. Okay, next up is Senator Haskell.

SEN. HASKELL (26TH): Senator Maroney, Representative Borer and esteemed members of the committee, thank you so much for having us here today to testify. My name is Will Haskell. I represent the 26TH District in the State Senate. I'm really honored today to be standing with two constituents and two folks who I have come to know as friends as well. Chris Reeb and Ed Sakowski who

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are going to share the story of Staff Sergeant Tyler Michael Reeb who served his country honorably, leading over 200 missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and then fortunately took his own life at the age of 34. So, rather than saying anymore, I'm going to turn the mic over to this remarkable family, who I've come to learn so much from.

CHRISTOPHER REEB: Good afternoon Chairman Maroney, Chairman Borer and members of the committee. I'd like to start off this afternoon with thanking all of those in the room who provided service to our country. My name is Christopher Reeb and I reside in Weston. I'm here today though as an uncle of Staff Sergeant Tyler Michael Reeb. My nephew was a Marine scout sniper who during his three tours was an integral part on over 200 missions, as Will said. Tyler first-handedly witnessed the very parts of war we don't often see or don't like to discuss.

Tyler performed his skill taught by the military with precision and accuracy looking through the crosshairs of a finely focused scope at the target in front of him. Gently pulling the trigger and watching intently as his target dropped, that of a subhuman life, as he put it, there is no doubt our country is safer because of his service and dedication. How many times he did this, we'll never know as Tyler's saying was amateurs advertise. However, first and foremost, Tyler was a father to his 5-year-old daughter, Hailey, a son to his parents, Michael and Jamie, a brother to his sister, Alexis, a grandson to my mom, a nephew to his aunts and uncles and last but not least a cousin to many. After Tyler's honorable discharge from the Marines in 2015, he worked in various capacities in Richmond, Virginia, Pensacola, Florida and Alabama

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until September of 2018 when he came to Connecticut to stay and work with me for a short period, while awaiting to begin his position with the State Department. It lasted a little longer as our government shut down and he stayed with us until March. Um, that was the last time I saw Tyler.

On October 14, 2019 I received news from my brother, a call no parent should have to make that his son, my nephew took his own life. On October - Tyler was laid to rest in Quantico National Cemetery on November 23RD with full military honors. I know our time is limited before you, but I do want you to know that although Tyler held a position in the military that not many do, he was a genuine and gentle young man. I'm in front of you today because it's our family's belief that our military does an outstanding job of preparing our civilian enlistees, most of which are adolescents to become soldiers and ready for - ready them for the days ahead and their job of protecting our country. It is also our family's belief that not enough is being done to prepare these very men and women to re-enter a healthy civilian lifestyle. Unfortunately, our belief is backed by the statistics provided from the VA that at least 20 veterans take their lives every single day.

Our men and women go through a bootcamp and as a Naval chaplain described to me, it is not until they have had their head shaved and deprived to sleep, endured 13 weeks or so of excessive amounts of physical training that they are prepared to put a live round in the gun and take a shot at the silhouette target of a human being. Then we send them to participate in work, in what we call work. Unfortunately, its necessary. Upon leaving the

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Armed Forces, these soldiers must partake in a transition assistance program known as TAP, which is a three-day program addressing personal assessment, financial planning, VA benefits and an overview of employment topics. This leaves a big gap and no mention of posttraumatic stress our soldiers had to endure while overseas. How do we expect them to deal with that? The answer has been let's make mental programs available and there's plenty available and the VA and others do a great job at providing that. However, the challenge is our military is taught to be strong and tough. They have been tough survival skills.

Admissions of ones need of psychological help exposes weakness. However, we in this room know it doesn't but that's the stigma attached with such. Our ask is this, if it takes 13 weeks of bootcamp that is mandatory for everyone entering the service, we should have a reintegration program that would become standard part of their service that includes whatever time is necessary to prepare them for a new civilian life. Many veterans polled say that they would reup with the military if they had a chance because they felt that they were part of a group or family there. When they return, these men and - these very men and women are faced with isolation and sense of not fitting as most civilians don't get what military life was or my life was about. I don't pretend to know the exact program we need but I am 100 percent certain on a few things. The current CAP program is not addressing the challenge of reintegration for our soldiers.

The current TAP program is not addressing PTS. There is a stigma associated with PTS and possible tarnishing of one's record should they admit it. My

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nephew wanted to continue to operate after he left the service and he avoided the available help as not to have it on his record. There are programs that exist that do address these issues but are available, not mandatory nor standardized. A newly expanded TAP program must include mental wellbeing, address PTS and other psychological challenges faced when they step off the bus, if you will.

The newly expanded TAP program must be standardized so that each and everyone leaving the service or returning from work goes through it, the same way they do in bootcamp. I have much more to say, however, I would like to end with two basic thoughts. How many more days are we going to let another 20 take their own life, and how many lives did it take before the state and federal government got together to put mandatory seatbelts in cars and now, they make us wear them. I believe that this is something that we can do together. Let's save the lives of our heroes that provide me the freedom of which is afforded me the luxury of standing you here before you today. I would like to thank you all.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you so much, and first of all, we're very sorry on behalf of the entire committee for your loss and thank you for sharing your story, so, um, those stories always help drive home what were here to do and their a reminder of how much more work we need to do, so thank you. Did you also want to say a few words?

ED SAKOWSKI: Yes, I do. I have a - Actually my name is Ed Sakowski. I'm also an uncle of Tyler, not just his uncle but my wife and I were his godparents. I have a statement here from his father who could not be here today, and I'll read that. My

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name is Michael Reeb. I'm the father of Staff Sergeant Tyler Michael Reeb, a young man born and raised here in Connecticut. My son was expertly trained and a decorated Marine sniper, devotedly serviced our country for eight years, leading more than 200 missions in Iraq and Afghanistan and highly regarded instructor at Assault Scout Sniper School in Quantico, Virginia.

Following honorable discharge, he helped shape protective forces for foreign diplomats as a subject matter expert and tactical instructor within the U.S. Department of State. He was a strong man with a gentle soul. Always willing to give his all and earned an impeccable professional reputation. Tragically in October of 2019, Tyler took his own life at age 34 after struggling with posttraumatic stress and the difficulties of returning to civilian life. I'm here in Tyler's spirit of helping others to encourage better assistance for our men and women of the Armed Forces. Our U.S. Military takes enough - takes care enough - cares enough to superbly train and prepare our warriors for deadly combat. Cares enough to lay our fallen children to rest with deep compassion and full military honors and now must responsibly care enough to superbly train and prepare our warriors for safe return home. We must do better. Legislation being considered here today is critically important to families and urgently needed.

The Reeb family is further advocating the development of effective valuation and guidance program, which would be part of regular duty for all military personnel toward the end of their service and more comprehensive than anything now in place. Our vision is intended to fully eliminate any stigma

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real or perceived that's associated with asking for help. Along the way, we've lent our voice to other methods that can help. SB 356 an act concerning the mailing information regarding veterans' benefits and suicide prevention to certain benefits - to certain veterans is a small step in the right direction. I urge you to act in a way that makes this benefit available to all our veterans. Thank you for the opportunity to be heard, and its signed by his father, Michael C. Reeb.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you very much for your testimony. Senator Maroney go ahead.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much for being here. I'm always amazed by the, unfortunately, I have been working on suicide prevention legislation and I've had the opportunity to meet a number of families who had relatives who died by suicide, and I'm amazed by the strength to come forward especially when it, for you, its really so recent still in October. So, thank you for taking this tragedy and trying to prevent other families from having to go through this tragedy, and I think, you know, that the national statistics are sobering for 20-22 veterans a day who die from suicide, but in Connecticut every 22 hours someone dies from suicide, um, and that's kids as young as age 10 and senior citizens and then the veterans, so we need to find a way, as you say to make us de-systematized the mental health, which I think that one of the bill on - going beyond the sick leave that we had talked about, some of that is for people who have appointments, right, and need to keep going to those appointments. And you did provide some, a list of recommendations. Now that - those recommendations a

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lot of them are really what the service can do while - before they've actually been discharged.

Do you have any recommendations as a state of what we can do once people come here and we are doing more to try to recruit veterans to move to this state if they weren't here or some of them and oftentimes it's the reservist who may come back and, you know, if you come back and your on a base, you have other people around you who understand what you've been through and you can probably more easily find at least someone to talk to if not the assistance you need, but if you're a reservist and you're going back home into a community that as you pointed out, doesn't fully understand what you've been through. Are there any things that you can think of and, you know, we can follow up with Senator Haskell if they come to afterwards?

CHRISTOPHER REEB: I certainly wish I had a well thought out answer for you. While my nephew was living with me, and he lived in Weston, which was just one or two towns over from New Canaan where he grew up and he had, you know, one friend that we would, you know, they would get together. But other than that, it wasn't a whole group of community and he said to me, you know, while we were working together, he said like, you know, I know like you - like this is your thing but, you know - like you know, its not mine, and he didn't necessarily say, you know, what was. I had the distinction that guns were, right, and that's - because that's what he was taught and that's what his profession was. And, fortunately and unfortunately, you can't make a life at taking people lives and shooting guns, and that's why he became a, you know, a trainer, but it obviously wasn't enough. So, more directly to your

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question, I'm sorry, I don't have the answer but if you give me time, I will work on it. I am - we are out for solutions, and yes there are the veterans that are out of the service need the help now as well, and how you reach them right. Because we can only make things available to them. Unfortunately, you can't make it mandatory that they come in and seek some help.

ED SAKOWSKI: I just have one thing to add to that, and you mentioned mental health earlier. I think the need to shift the culture of mental health is for the public, we need to educate the public that mental health, in our case PST - PTS rather, is not a disease that is incurable, and we need - whether we do this through public service announcements or, however, we do this, and I think this is something that we can start on a state level.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Senator Abrams.

SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): Good afternoon. Thank you so much for your testimony. I have to say that I'm struck by two things. One, is that, um, were talking about a young man who returned to a very loving family, extended family and that's not often the case for our service people. So that really strikes me that everyone needs the support no matter what situation they're returning to, and also I'm really in terms of solutions, I'm, um, struck by the - by what you did so well in describing the time that we take and the resources we put into train people to become service members but then we don't put that same time and effort into helping them reintegrate into our communities, and so I think that - I agree with you right now it's a permissive

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choice, we have services and if you would like to take advantage of them, we have some good things available, but I do think that for myself, I'm going to be shifting my thinking to it becoming more a mandate in terms of a reintegration program. That we make sure that we're doing things that will help these young men and young women come back and be members of their community and feel like they belong. So, I thank you very much for your testimony. I have a lot to think about and a lot of ways I think we can do better.

CHRISTOPHER REEB: Thank you Senator Abrams. I appreciate very much the comments of our - regarding our family, and that's the troubling thing, we're not smothering but we're a close family. And, if you ride in the car with us, you would be surprised that we even get along [laughing], but whenever there is an issue we are always there for each other and I hate to say it this way but I feel like we miss this because none of us saw this coming to where it ended with Tyler, and Senator Maroney, just to follow up on your question, because I did have the thought. There's veterans organizations that exist and pardon me for not knowing the names of them right now but they're were veterans gather and have a beer or something like that, right, and something like that could be created but more for the younger veterans that are getting out today. I don't think that they feel as welcome at the clubs that exist now.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: So, you're thinking like the American Legion.

CHRISTOPHER REEB: Yes, thank you and the VFW, thank you.

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SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): I would like to say that I am working with families who have had members die by suicide. That's often the feeling everybody is left with, like how did we miss this. So, I really applaud the fact that you take that and try to turn it into something positive because its absolutely the way everyone feels, and that we who want to work on this issue feel in general. Like how we not miss this again. So, um, I really appreciate that fact that you would both be here and try to do something positively so that another family does not have to experience this.

CHRISTOPHER REEB: Just so you know that Ed and I are the representatives and we started this basically on a brainstorm on our way to help our brother clear out Tyler's apartment in Richmond, and we just - it was a seven hour drive. We never turned the radio on, we talked, and this question came up and why isn't - why isn't there a program. Like its too simple to miss but yet so simple that we're not doing it, and that's why like I equated it to seatbelts. Because as a kid, I was thrown in the backseat and the front seat and we never had seatbelts and thankfully, my parents were safe drivers. But, things like this can be done.

REP. BORER (115TH): Senator did you have a - Senator Leone.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you Madam Chair and good afternoon. And first and foremost, my condolences as well to you and the family members for the loss, but I think everything that you said and some of the comments made by the committee is spot-on. We do have to do more, and I was going to ask a couple questions, but you eluded to that, in terms of as

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parents or as family and you mentioned, like how did we miss this, right. It's difficult for us as we try to figure out how to be better, how to identify what the warning signs are.

If there are even warning signs to see if you're not looking for them, which is very difficult. So, you know as your trying to focus your efforts on what to do and how to make it better, you and other members that have been affected, as you look back, then you might be able to say oh there was a sign, I just didn't realize it because I didn't understand the implications of what he or she was facing as they came back to civilian population. And then on the flip side, we need to hear from the veterans themselves as they come back what are the resources they need to adjust back into the civilian population because your right, if you - if your career or your MOS is, you know, in infantry or in sniper school, those don't convert well to the civilian population. I mean if you're an engineer or even officer with leadership skills or, you know, any kind of other technical expertise, that can be translated and so, I think that's probably one of the things we need to focus on, look at the skills that don't transfer well and that should be one of our first clues that's the population we need to focus on.

In going forward, you know, you mentioned the older networking organizations as the American Legion and VFW and those are all from the greatest generation, those wars back then. Now you have different groups that are out there but they're not as large just yet. You know, so you have the Iraq, Afghanistan veterans association, IABA, that's one that we - you could look into as well as a few others, but I think

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as we need to figure out how to deal with this issue, this - its more than just an issue, it's a problem now because were losing too many. We need to know what those warning signs are.

We need to know how to identify them before it becomes a warning sign to give them some support, and we have to figure out how to make them transition well because your right, you could be in a loving community but if you don't understand what they went through and what their thinking in their head, all signs outward could look positive but in fact they're not, and sometimes it just takes peer-to-peer, veteran who has gone through to be able to speak with them because if your coming back from the military, as much as your family loves you, it they haven't experienced it, they just - we won't understand as civilians and they won't know how to articulate it and so it needs to be a peer-to-peer response as well.

So, there's a lot there that I just said we need to focus on but we need to coalesce these thoughts because your not alone but many family members that fall through this think that they are and then they all want to do something and its not too long before you realize that there is support out there. So, you just got to get connected. Thank you, Madam Chair.

ED SAKOWSKI: I would like to address the first thing that you said about recognizing the signs. Tyler told us time-and-time again that he wasn't like that. He was talking other people off the ledge. We did recognize that he had a problem with alcohol that should have been a warning sign that we

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picked up on but the fact that he told us that he would never commit suicide, you know, [Crosstalk].

SEN. LEONE (27TH): You know it's funny with suicide, sometimes you just fall into a downturn and its - there's not someone to pull you out at that moment, the wrong thing could occur and I bet - I would hope, I would venture to say that if someone was there when he was having those thoughts to talk him through it, he might have recovered, and so it just unfortunately you know that didn't happen. The right person at the right time wasn't there because I've heard that many times that the ones that eventually do commit the suicide are, they do on the outwards are, you know, fairly stable. They didn't think of themselves that way. There's just that slight moment when you know you just thinking the wrong thoughts, and that's where the support really comes into play.

ED SAKOWSKI: Our feeling is that's exactly what happened. It was a spur of the moment decision that he made when he was drunk and then that's what happened, and your right, I believe if somebody was there that - or if he had somebody to call, if he had made that call, that it wouldn't have happened but we're here to see that it doesn't happen again.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you for again sharing your story. We are with you and hopefully we can do as much as we can to make sure it doesn't happen again.

ED SAKOWSKI: Thank you Senator Leone.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you everybody for listening.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you Senator. Senator Anwar.

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SEN. ANWAR (3RD): Thank you so much Madam Chair. Thank you so much for your testimony and thank you for sharing your pain to make sure others do not have to suffer in the same way. I think this bill is a conversation starter and maybe one exit ramp but not necessarily the exit ramp. This letter will help maybe help people think when their completing it but it may not necessarily be the only answer, and I think there is a lot more that needs to be done, and as you shared the experience and conversation with Tyler, I could not help thinking that even the alcohol may have been a self-therapy for underlying illness, and then that's what we see more and more in the people who are suffering, whether it's posttraumatic or depression or other illnesses that may come. That because sometimes access to preventative health and in psychological support is not as strong and as easily available, people pick up some other ways of treatment; and so, I think while it's going to help us identify some individuals, we will need a lot more to be done and I think this is a good start but I am hoping there's going to be a lot more that we will need to do as we move forward.

ED SAKOWSKI: I will share a story with you that with Tyler when we recognized that he did need some help, he was - his mother took him to the VA Hospital with calling first. They told her that they would be there waiting for him to take him in and lead him through the process. She took him there, dropped him off. No one was waiting there for him. He waited six hours to see anyone and, in the meantime, he's calling, get me out of here. I don't want to be here. So, I think the VA has to come a long way also.

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SEN. ANWAR (3RD): Yes, I think that's the reality of our challenges that - the resources in the existing systems that are being created have not necessarily been placed to the amount of challenges that we are seeing. The VA system has done an amazing job, it does a good job but it is not ready for this next generation of veterans, and that's where we need to put the resources and the manifestation of the challenges and the illness that we are seeing is completely different than what VA was historically managing. Not to take away from the previous things, it's just a difference in the manifestations of - and the age groups that we're looking at also is resulting in we're missing people, and then Tyler was missed. And, then there were so many opportunities, there were so many exit ramps that you go back and look at that you would say you know, there were opportunities we have missed. This bill is a good conversation starting. I wish it would do more. I think we'll have to do a lot more going forward and strengthen the existing mechanisms as well.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you and part of most of what we're trying to do is raise the awareness, and push it forward and we are available at any time to do anything that we're capable to do to make - to save some lives.

SEN. ANWAR (3RD): Yes. Thank you and I think you have a great advocate with Senator Haskell on your side as well.

SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): Thank you.

ED SAKOWSKI: We're fortunate to have Senator Haskell.

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CHRISTOPHER REEB: If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't be here today.

REP. BORER (115TH): That's great. Thank you for all your input. I think Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you Madam Chair and thank you for your testimony. My condolences to you and your family and thank you for being here. I sat through and we're going to listen to Bob Havens, who is a Vietnam Combat veteran. RGH, it's a resilient grows here, it's suicide prevention, I think they're going to be proposed - presenting prevention in this building in about two or three weeks. I would hope our committee and members listen to this. It is something that we all too often signs are missed. I sat through the presentation, it was about an hour and a half and I was in awe but also saddened to see that there are so many things that we do miss as a society for veterans and nonveterans, and I think RGH has done a really good job and that they've been trying to get more exposure started as a veteran's group but now its really for everybody, and I think as a state and a country we need to have more people like RGH, and the steps that you mention about when you come home, I went through - you go through bootcamp but when you come home I didn't fight in a war but you have two or three days of nothing. You should have weeks of, especially if you're a sniper like Senator Leone said, and/or in combat, it is a totally different animal than just serving and not fighting, and so I think you make valid points and I think we need to listen to those and follow up with that. I just - RGH is a good organization, its not enough but we need more RGH's and more people to listen and have eyes and ears.

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SEN. LEONE (27TH): I'll look into RGH for sure, and again if there is anything that we can do to promote anyone's cause to save all the men and women that served our country, let's face it, their the ones that deserve it the most. How we can help, we certainly will. [Crosstalk] Obviously, in Tyler's names and everyone else's.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you and I'm sorry, thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Representative Rose.

REP. ROSE (115TH): Thank you Madam Chair. Gentleman thank you for your strength and your bravery for coming here to tell us Tyler's story. Just real quick. My son was a forward observer with the Connecticut National Guard, so I lived that reintegration coming home. You nailed it. Three days is not enough. He came back, none of his friends were his friends. They had different experiences for the two years he was gone. He had different experiences. They couldn't come together and even begin to imagine what he had gone through just like what Tyler had gone through. So, I - like I said, you totally nailed it. I'm thinking you have a wonderful group of men behind you with various hats and in Milford we have the Disabled American Veterans, the American Legions and the VFWs. For us to try to get something through the Federal government and the Department of Defense, it's going to take us years. I would love to see maybe our VFWs and our American Legions working with groups to maybe reach out more to the younger vets that are coming home and maybe having some group meetings there for younger vets. You know, I know

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it's a problem sometimes getting to find out who they are because of privacy issues and whatnot.

We usually use the list from down at the City Hall for the tax exemptions. That's how we find out who the veterans are in town. But if we could get - because there is - we, like I said Milford, we have three organizations that are phenomenal and they're in the neighborhoods, they're already established and perhaps if you could work with those organizations to start doing some programs within their buildings, they're already here, that would be the quickest way for us to be able to actually get something going within a year. That's just my two sense. [laughing]

SEN. LEONE (27TH): I thank you for that and I will say this. I have years and I will continue to push, and you probably can relate to this and be my final thought because I'm sure you folks are all busy and I very much appreciate your questions and your time, but I feel that as most of these veterans that go in as adolescents and they go from having, you know, mom and dad pay for their, you know, education and pay for their food and pay for the roof over their head, and the military and it's no fault of theirs but extends that, and takes care of all those things. And the education that they're getting is for, in Tyler's case, was to be the sniper. When they come out, it's a different world and, you know, it would just be like, you know, many of our children goes through college and that's how they break away from the adolescence and that's true with the period of time, and these are - the veterans and the people that serve our country are the most valued there are. So, I really again thank you so much for all of your time and questions and

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thoughts, and I'm again - I mean anybody that needs our contact information can certainly reach out to us and we're glad to help in any way we can.

REP. BORER (115TH): Well thank you so much for all of your testimony. I just want to add a couple of final notes and one is, you know, to Representative Rose's point, it takes years to go through a national initiative and a national change but I wish we can push that because what we do in Connecticut, they might not be doing in New York and then we have the veterans that get discharged and then their coming into Connecticut and they might not necessarily receive that intense discharge help that they need. So, it would be great if we could do it uniformity - in a uniform fashion, and I think a lot of this sometimes comes down to tracking as well. Representative Rose mentioned the tax exemption list, so we haven't gotten communications out to our veterans in our communities by using the tax exemption list, that's only if you pay taxes are you on the tax exemption list. And, we have a bill that talks about mailing information and that's a great start and good step but that's only if we know your address and you have a home. So, I think in Connecticut we have to do a better job of getting our arms around where our veterans are because there's a lot of veterans that don't necessarily - we don't know where they are, so it's difficult for us to reach them. And, then also to your point about intense information and discharging, I think their also needs to be a proactive follow up in the near future, right, because when your coming into the community, your getting a lot of information at once, so I think there needs to be that extensive follow up as well that reaches out three months, six

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months, nine months, how you doing. So, thank you very much for all of your testimony. Thank you - Oh, Representative Ferraro.

REP FERRARO (117TH): Good afternoon. I didn't get to hear all of your testimony, but I was in another committee doing some screening. I did read the testimony that you presented and, I heard the comments made by members of the this committee with regards to federal programs taking a long time and pushing the - pushing it so that a state program might be a little quicker but my feeling is, is that there does need to be a federal program in that the federal government would have cognizance over all 50 states and it would be great if Connecticut would do something but there are 49 other states involved, and my question to you would be, have you presented yet or testified yet to - on a national level to our state delegation to the Senate or the House?

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you Representative Ferraro. We had the good fortune of being invited to Washington and met with Senator Blumenthal along with Congressman Himes and they have put us in touch with a few other senators from various states that serve on the VA. We also are trying to work with links to the DOD and we believe - we too believe that this is a federal, it has to be a federal mandate between the DOD and the VA to an order - in order to have this happen.

REP. BOYD (50TH): What we're looking to do is they have the TAPS program now for and were looking to attach something up to that, so attach something that's already there, we figure we have a better shot of getting it through quicker by doing that.

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So, that's our goal and that's what we're working on.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Just to follow up to that line of thought. Did you sense from talking to the federal delegation that there was a will, that there was you know some fire in the belly so to speak to move this forward on that level?

REP. BOYD (50TH): Everyone we have spoken to has been nothing but supportive. We went to Senator Manson's office, Senator Hirono and Senator Sinema and all of their staff were extremely supportive and told us that we would no doubt have the support of the senators, and I want to offer my condolences for your loss and I want to also add my voice to support anyway that we can to the state delegation and state committee but also I want to commend you on your willingness to come forward and bear for all to see, you know, the hurt that you have been through and the tragedy that's in your lives and sometimes it is necessary to do that to get the ball moving, and I think if you sound like your dotting the I's and crossing the T's and I think that we get some movement on the federal level, it will move down through the state levels and will work through VA's and the DOD's and I think we can get a nationwide federal mandated program that would be very beneficial to those returning, especially from the theater war.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: We've always said this isn't about us, this is about them. You know and we'll do whatever we have to do. We have no pride [laughing]. We will bear it all, that's not a problem.

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REP. FERRARO (117TH): I appreciate it and thank you very much and thank you Chairs.

REP. BOYD (50TH): Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you Representative Ferraro. Anybody else? Okay. Well, thank you very much. Great discussion. Our next speaker is Gerry Wright.

GERRY WRIGHT: Good morning Senator and I see Madam Chair left already. Before you, you'll see this paper. I hope its still on your desks. We do have a bill in Congress, which is HR 566 and the Senate Bill 332. There is nothing else attached to those bills. It's the Agent Orange Exposure Fairness Act. We put this in motion about two years ago. We had a chance to get it introduced in the house again when the new Congress changed in January. We have 41 members of the House of Representatives as co-sponsors but only three on the Senate side. And I did visit Washington. I talked to many of the Senators there.

We do have the majority of the Representatives in Connecticut on board with this, and I'm not sure that maybe you understand exactly what Agent Orange is but if you look at the second paper on the back of this one here is - the name Agent Orange from orange strips that were on a 55 gallon drum that when it was stored with herbicides include agent white, agent blue and there is agent purple and agent green and that's how they ended up with Agent Orange is that mixed those two together. Agent white does not have any dioxin in it, so when they sprayed agent white, which is also a defoliant it took too long to work and that's why the government stepped up production and started spraying Agent

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Orange. Agent Orange was sprayed out of C-123 aircraft. With me, I was sprayed it out of a back of a 5-ton truck. I sprayed it around my compound. I sprayed it around the roads. It would really unbelievably kill the vegetation within three days. Six-foot grass would be laying right on the ground. As a combat engineer we would deliver bulldozers to clear the land and we were breathing all the dusk. The military on anything military has, has a manual. Whether it was a P38 or fork or canteen, it has a manual on how to use it and how to clean it and take care of it. They do have such a thing for Agent Orange, and they denied it for 40 years, and I found it.

I found the manual on how to handle a dioxin, and its wearing hats, gloves, respiratory mask, how to decontaminate yourself after you were sprayed. Well ladies and gentleman, myself included along with many other Vietnam veterans never wore hats or shirts or gloves or masks, and I stood on the back of a five ton truck and sprayed around our compound, I remember getting a feedback blast from the air and remember it burning my nose and saying God this is awful but in three days we could see the enemy and that was the important at that time. When I was discharged in 1971, there was no Agent Orange test. I didn't even know what Agent Orange was. We didn't know what it was. Never heard about it until 1978 when I moved to Connecticut. Went down and had the Agent Orange exam at West Haven VA and my claim was denied. My claim was denied because there was no paper trail. Nothing was entered into my files, that I had sprayed this dioxin. So, when I retired and sold my business in 2015 out of Bolton, I decided that I was going to find out who in this

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country was ill from this beside me. And I brought an orange Honda Goldwing motorcycle with a trailer, lettered sprayed in betrayed and started across this country and visited 32 states over 10,000 miles and talking to as many veterans as, their families, the widows of veterans and their grandchildren.

If you realize that this poison is following us down through and now into a third generation. It's changing our DNA. This is so toxic that its 170,000 times stronger cyanide. It's 170,000 times stronger than cyanide. When we mix this, we didn't know what we were mixing. Found out later there was mixing with diesel fuel. They mixed it with diesel fuel because the petroleum would stick to the leaves of the trees and the canopy covers down the Ho Chi Minh trail This would go into the water supplies. Down the Wang Thong River and I got pictures of the truck that I would go out to the river, draw up this water, take it back to my compound and we would shower and drink in it. For the two tours I did in Vietnam, I drank the water out of the rivers that was contaminated with poison. It ended up being on the Navy ships.

The reason it on the Navy ships is that they would come in from Guantanamo Bay or Subic Bay with a load of food, ammo, whatever it was, and they unload it, take our water for ballast. When they did that, they heated the water to get rid of the salt so they could drink it, enhance it the Agent Orange dioxin 12 times, and these sailors on 700 ships for 10 years were drinking contaminated and showering in contaminated water. Never told by the military how bad it was. Did you realize that in 1961 and 1962 the only person authorized - to authorize spraying of a contaminate that's so toxic is the President of

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the United States and that was authorized by Kennedy in 62 and again in Johnson and again by President Nixon up till 1971. Around 20 million gallons of this was sprayed, so they tell us. How much more who knows. When I took on this mission, I went to Congressman Joe Courtney and I said the VA says we have 14 illnesses that we could have from Agent Orange along with 35 cancers. Why is there an end date, an off said date on 3 or the 14? Chloracne, acute sub-neuropathy, and there is also another one that has to do with liver cancer. Had end dates of one year of separation from dioxin with a 10 percent disability, and I didn't hear about it for eight years.

How could I claim an illness or be treated for something we didn't hear about? So that's what started this and I'm just so happy that the State of Connecticut has a resolution 18 to send to Congress to get behind this Agent Orange Exposure Fairness Act. I sat down with the VSO'S across the country. We now have 14 of the major veteran service organizations behind what we do. The third paper in that folder is a sample from the American Legion, and they were very supportive. So, we have, in fact, I even drove to Spokane, Washington last summer on the motorcycle to speak to the VVA Convention on the resolution they had on this and they back it as well. So, we have the major organizations behind this. The State of Connecticut will be the first to pass a resolution to support this bill in the House and Senate in Washington, and as a senator I told earlier, I like being first. So, this gives us bragging rights. I hope you pass this resolution and you support what were doing for the Agent Orange for the Vietnam veteran. As of

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2016, the VA said 300,000 of Vietnam veterans have died from Agent Orange related illnesses. Right now, it's over 600,000, and 2.2, 2.7 million of us served during that time. As of three weeks ago, I was told that 660,000 of us left and were dying at a rate of 390 a day. So, the VA has pretty much put an end date on my life along with the rest of the Vietnam veterans and those who served in Korea, and they sprayed along the DMZ in Korea as well. As long as with - as in Laos and in Thailand and in Cambodia they sprayed in that area too, but we weren't there, so they don't tell us about that. Any questions?

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you. Thank you for coming up. So, I'm 51-years-old but my father was a World War II vet. He had me very late in life. He was 47 when I was born. When my mom was 41. So, they had five children early when they were young, so I know it seems a little unusual, I'm 51 but I actually had three brothers that fought in Vietnam. I'm oldest brother he died of cancer. He was exposed to Agent Orange in 2000, he was 52. Whoa, I didn't think I would get emotional. Sorry. My other brother, Kevin he was also exposed to Agent Orange and he has stage 4 prostate cancer. He is still alive. He was diagnosed maybe four years ago, and he moved out to Nevada. He's out there now and my brother is taking care of him, so, definitely touches pretty close to home, so. I just want to thank you for advocating for them and the rest and I'll definitely be co-sponsoring this bill, so thank you

GERRY WRIGHT: Thank you very much. The one other thing I do want to thank the Senator for. Down in

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Milford, you were down there when I had a meeting and a friend of mine approached you who was not a veteran but I've known him and his wife for many years, and it must inspired you to bring this resolution forward and Senator we want to thank you.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you Representative Vail and thank you Gerry. Representative Ferraro.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): As soon as you asked the question, where there any questions, I was just - I didn't really have - I was almost floored. I mean this is like how could you ask a question about this, the evidence is so overwhelming. Our country definitely let the veterans down, the Vietnam veterans down, and taking so long to get on top of this. You know apologies just aren't enough. All I can tell you is that whatever comes out of this committee, whatever goes forward in our General Assembly, I will co-sponsor it and I will give my 100 percent support and do whatever I can to help.

GERRY WRIGHT: Thank you. I appreciate that.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions? If not, thank you very much for coming here today and for all of your advocacy Gerry, so, thank you. So, we're going to continue alternating, so next is public officials, Danny Hayes, please.

DANNY HAYES: Good afternoon.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): If you could just push the button so that the red light goes on.

DANNY HAYES: There we go. Good afternoon Senators and Representatives and all the brothers out here doing good work. My name is Danny Hayes and I'm the

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Director of Veterans Affairs for the City of Danbury. The Soldiers, Sailors and Marine fund rep for the surrounding towns and an Army combat veteran. I'm here in support of S.B. 361, an act concerning the use of Medicaid, Medicare and Tricare funds to provide veterans with transportation for medical appointments. I've been recently finding myself driving some of my clients in my personal vehicle to West Haven, Castle Point to the VA's. When their rides are canceled, whether an issue of weather or if some of them, they just don't drive anymore. My concern is these great ideas are opposed with no real way to pay for the programs. Our Commissioner Tom Saadi and everyone at the Department of Veteran Affairs have done a spectacular job at increasing collaboration with towns, local veteran organizations and the help and guidance I receive could not be any better. Based on my experiences, I understand the difficulty of scheduling these trips and the time they can consume by the drivers. I also know that the department is stretched thin and it does not have the current staff for this program. So, I urge the committee to include funding for the vehicles and staff needed for such a program. With this we can give our veterans the care that they not only deserve but they've earned. Thank you.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much for coming here to testify today. Does anyone have any questions? [laughing] Okay, thank you. All right, next we will go back to the general public and I believe Elizabeth Gara is here now. Thank you very much. Okay, the red button is already on [laughing] so you don't have to push it.

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ELIZABETH GARA: Thank you. My name is Elizabeth Gara. I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Waterworks Association, which represents municipal, private and regional water companies throughout Connecticut, and I'm here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 359, which is actually aimed at insuring that veterans receive credit for relevant military education, training and experience when applying for civilian water system operator certification. This is also applicable to the wastewater industry. This is an issue of considerable importance to our association as well as to our national association, the American Waterworks Association. We are seeing a record number of retirements in the industry and having difficulty in filling these positions.

At the national level they project that were going to see in the next 10 years about 37 percent of the water utility workforce retiring and that is of critical importance to us because clearly you need qualified people to maintain and operate systems to protect the public health and safety. We're very supportive of efforts to recognize the tremendous contribution that our veterans have made to our country. Their technical expertise, work ethic and so forth and ensuring that there is a way to make sure that their eligible to sit for the certified water operator's licenses. However, the bill as drafted actually does not refer to the certified water operators, it refers to some other water related issues. It does refer to the wastewater operator licenses but it does so in kind of an awkward way. It references the Department of Labors apprenticeship training program and saying that if the Department of Labor has certified that an

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individual has the requisite training and experience that they're eligible to sit for the water related operator exams. However, that's probably not the most appropriate mechanism.

Under current law the Department of Public Health is actually charged with overseeing the certified water system operator's licensure program, and that makes a lot of sense. You need to make sure people are duly qualified and the Department of Public Health is the lead agency in terms of safe drinking water issues, and there are some ways that we think that we can help make sure that our veterans receive the relevant education and training in order to sit for those exams. There is actually a guide that has been developed by USCPA and some of the associations to provide the state agencies when they're certifying people with kind of an apples-to-apples comparison of the skills that are directly or indirectly translate into different types of positions needed in the water sector. So, we have worked with the State Department of Public Health over the years to address these issues.

They have recently adapted a standardized test prepared by the Association of Boards of Certification and that will help address some of the licensing reciprocity issues but the real delays were seeing is in determining what relevant education and experience translate into the pre-requisite that the department wants to see as somebody who's eligible to sit for the exam, and I think we can do a lot of better in that regard, particularly with our veterans. For example, if you look at the actual app - licensing application, it doesn't reference any type of military experience, so that it may deter veterans from seeking positions

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in the field, and in addition because there is sometimes such a long wait, and there is no guidelines available on the state level to assist veterans in identifying potential career opportunities, I think it does deter them and that they may end up seeking positions in other fields. So, we are supportive of the efforts to address this. We'd be happy to work with the committee and the State Department of Public Health to develop a program to make sure that we do have a way to encourage and support our veterans that would like to pursue careers in the water sector. Thank you.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much.  
Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you Mr. Chair and thank you for being here for your testimony. We did the MO - MOS Bill a couple years ago, which does lead to job - to military experience in job training to the civilian life, and I don't know if you have worked off that, but if you contact like the Department of Military, do you contact the Department of Veteran's Affairs in Connecticut, you get names and people that are looking for work through the Department of Labor.

ELIZABETH GARA: So for the Department of Labor, which and I am familiar with the Bill, it does refer to the apprenticeable trade, and again the certified water operators are very different, and the - that program is administered by the State Department of Public Health, so I don't know that, that necessarily translate. I think we - there is a veteran's workforce initiative that our sister organization, the Connecticut section of the American Waterworks Association is working on with

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their national counterpart to do some of that. We've had speakers at our events to talk about the value in hiring veterans and things of that nature. But I don't think that they've ever discussed that MOS Guidebook with the Department of Public Health and I think that needs to happen. So, I have reached out to them to talk about some of those issues and see whether or not we can make sure that, that information is available on the DPH water certified operator licensing program.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): So, I appreciate you wanting to do this. Obviously, we must need to change the statutes so you can hire somebody with credentials from their military experience but not civilian experience, is that - is that problem - that must be the problem that you can hire somebody.

ELIZABETH GARA: Well you can. What the problem is, is that there is no clear process for determining whether or not your experience or education and training is part of your military experience translates into what they want to see in terms of a certified water operator. And, so there is a guide that has been developed by EPA. I reference it and there is actually a link to it in my testimony, and it applies those military occupational specialties specifically to civilian drinking water and wastewater operations. So, I think if we use that and promote that as a guide, I think it can help address a lot of the situation.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I agree, and so we have to get through the Department of Public Health then it sounds like. All right, which we deal with. It makes sense actually.

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ELIZABETH GARA: It does make sense and again given the number of retirements in the industry, you know, I think this could actually be a real win-win for the water sector and for the veterans.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Are there any other questions? Thank you very much. I know I have spoken with Lori at the Regional Water Authority and, I mean, it is a big issue, the coming retirements and developing our water workforce and so, [Crosstalk] this is one way we can help out, that would be great.

ELIZABETH GARA: And I can attest that I have worked with the water industry for almost two decades now and they're some of the best people and very committed to their jobs and it seems to be a very rewarding career path for many individuals.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you so much for coming to testify. Next, Bob Havens. It's Representative Yaccarino's constituent. [laughing]

BOB HAVENS: Thank you Mr. Chair.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much for coming.

BOB HAVENS: Thank God the red light is on because I figured I'd screw this up and not be able to push the button. My name is Bob Havens. I'm a United States Navy Vietnam combat vet. I'm here for my Laotian Hmong friends and fellow warriors, SB 355, I think is the bill number. Before I begin, I just want to mention I was so moved by the gentleman whose nephew took his life. I will in fact be co-training here at the legislature on March 24 on a suicide awareness presentation, it's called QPR training, so I'd like to also emphasize, you know,

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as many of you that can be here and those you can speak to be here. We've been wanting to do this for some time because you're the folks who are going to get the word back out to your communities and will be able to address some of the concerns these gentleman had about why aren't more people being reached, you know, because we can get out just to so many people but with the legislature and all the Representatives and Senators behind us bringing back this information about what we do, we can hopefully get out there and help more folks.

So, I just wanted to mention that. As far as the Laotian Hmong Bill that you have before you, my relationship with these folks goes back, I was sitting there trying to add the years on my fingers, 53 years. I know I don't look it but [laughing]. I was only a 19-20-year-old kid. The reason why it goes back that far is I was a part of something called the Secret War in Laos, and I was a part of a Navy squadron called Observation Squadron 67 or VO67, which was a creation under a mandate from Secretary of Defense McNamara at the time to enter the Ho Chi Minh trail. He at the time was against bombing of Haiphong Harbor in North Vietnam. He didn't want to handle it that way, so he said you guys come up with something. Well, they came up with something called VO67, and we're sort of brought together from all parts of the country to form this squadron under the guise of something called an observation squadron. That was an undercover cover, if you will. We trained, went through survival training, ended up deploying to a base in Thailand called NKP, the Nakhon Phanom. I found out, albeit 40 something years later, that my friend, General Sar, whose here today was the guy

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that found that spot with the CIA and dug a big hole in the middle of the jungle and that became my home for a year.

To this day, I still thank Mr. Sar for that wonderful job, but what happened was that we had to drop - we were dropping electronic sensors along the Ho Chi Minh trail. The purpose was to pick up all kinds of movement, truck movement, etc. the Laotian Hmong were on the ground, as we were in the air in the same area. So that's why the relationship goes back 53 years. About 12 years ago at Quinnipiac University, they have a wonderful veterans awareness day every year. We bring in about 400 students and I'm really excited because this is our, I think my 15<sup>th</sup> one but this year we're just bringing in 6<sup>th</sup> graders, and that should be a real challenge because there is not a war that they familiar with, so when they come around to our tables and try to learn about Vietnam, Korea, whatever, what was that, we have our work cut out for us this year but we're looking forward to it. A woman came up to my table I had a memorabilia out and she said you were apart of the Secret War, now sometimes you just can't let things go, so I was still cautious about saying yes to that question, and this was like 40 years later because I couldn't talk about it by the way, which I didn't mention, for 30 years after I came home. It was not going to be declassified until 1998 from 1968.

So, even to this day, there are certain things I still won't talk about only because maybe I'm not supposed to, even though I guess I have the right to. So, she said - I said how did you know about the secret war? Oh, she said I have someone you have to meet, and that person turned out to be

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General Sar and I said, where is this guy. She said right in Windsor. I said oh my God. I called him that day and then that was the next day and we started pouring over maps and all kinds of things that we were both there at the same time. The other thing I told General Sar at the time is part of - a big part of my job was to plan, brief and de-brief the crews that went in on these missions, and I actually briefed Laotian Hmong scouts as part of my briefings way back then, and you know, I wanted to be here so badly today for a couple of reasons. One, we just completed a big event which was on, I'm on a committee for the Laotian Hmong.

We just made a great achievement by getting them the right to be buried in the State of Connecticut at a military cemetery in Middletown. So, although it was passed federally the year before, there is no state that had taken this on. The other pleasure of that, and I thank you, is that made Connecticut the first state in the nation to do this - to give these rights to these folks. Now the bad news, it took 44 years. So, I'm hoping what were talking about today isn't going to do that because I really liked to be around and I don't drink but I'll have a drink if we can get this stuff taken care of, okay. So that gets us to this point and, you know, when I think about these people, not only did they save over 300 downed flyers, but bringing it home for me is when I brief my crews, I was able to tell them now look if for whatever reason you get shot down, and if you survive the shoot down, I had safe areas they could go to, we had the Jolly Green Giants, which was a great Air Force rescue chopper crew.

They just made a movie about them, if I'm not mistaken, and we had these fellows and women on the

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ground entering areas ready to go in and pull our guys out. You know, one of the things that impressed me the most about what they did, is that they would go in to remove dead American flyers who were shot down. Why, because the United States couldn't be embarrassed. We were not in Laos supposedly. We were not in Cambodia. So, they lost, and I know personally, they lost lives going in to bring a dead American flyer out from behind enemy lines so it would get let out that we sent them in there in the first place. I'm going to wrap up with two quick things. VO67 lost three aircraft toward the end of our mission.

We were only created and dissolved in less than a year. [Crosstalk] The reason why we started breaking down in less than year is when they informed us, we were not the aircraft that should have been used for this mission. Shouldn't - because it ended up being the X-4 Bantam which is a little faster. We had old P2 double prop, double jet submarine hunters but we had the technology of dropping buoys, which we used to do to hung submarines and they transfigured that into dropping these sensors, so we were the only plane at the time and it was a big lumbering 300 mile an hour fixed-wing aircraft. In a matter of six weeks, a matter of fact, we just had an anniversary on the 27TH of February of our third crew. The first crew got hit, nine crew members on each plane. The first one got hit, all killed. The second one got hit, was told to return to base, said I can't return to base, we haven't finished. Came around and went through a second time. Faced all that enemy fire again, took more hits, tried to climb out and missed clearing a mountain top by 50 feet. Another nine men gone. The third aircraft

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and I'll wrap with this, was crew nine. Just had their anniversary. Seven of the crew members lived. The plane was hit, the flight engineer was killed on impact of the explosion from a 37 mm weapon.

By the way, the same weapon that Jane Fonda posed for in that famous picture, I just have to get that in there. He was killed, so the commander ordered everyone to bail out, the other seven, they did. Someone said they said his shoot open; his name was Commander Milius. They saw his shoot take one swing. We did pick up his emergency beeper for 24 hours, but the area was so hot we couldn't get ground people in to get him out. Lasted for 24 hours, time went by and he was listed as missing in action. Ten years later listed as presumed killed in action and right now out there in the ocean is a ship, it's a guided missile destroyer, it called the USS Milius, commissioned in his honor, and so he's still out there fighting for us. So, it means a lot to me because when I think about what they did, my friends did for us, and they have to fight, they get no medical benefits from the VA, that's another battle we into now. They had to fight for 44 years, 44 years to be buried. I want to leave you with one last thing, keep in mind, yeah, they lost over 55,000 people, yeah, they have thousands upon thousands of men and women wounded and missing limbs but guess what, they lost their country. They have no country to go back to. It's gone forever. We got to do what we can do. We got to help these folks out. I thank you for your time. Any questions I can answer for you?

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Representative Yaccarino.

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REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Well thank you Bob and thank you for your testimony. I got to know Bob Haven - Mr. Haven in May of 2019. With the help of this committee, this body, we did pass and get the burial rights the Laotian veterans and I really want to thank them for their service to this country, and I just was so impressed how dedicated they are to this country and I didn't realize until you had told me, like we could never go back to their homeland because they'll be executed, I would think. But I think they are veterans and I think they served our country well, and I think they deserve these rights. We did the burials. Federally, I think the Federal government should do a better job with them, but what your asking for is for the license plate and the rights for veteran benefits, is that - am I correct?

BOB HAVEN: That's correct.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, and in the past, we have done certain license plates and its usually the DMV will say well we need 30, I don't know what the number is. I think our clerk, or the chair knows, 400 hundred, and I think we could easily make up the number 400. I don't know how many Laotian veterans in Connecticut. Do you know, do you have an idea?

BOB HAVEN: I do not. General Sar would probably know.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): But I really - I was very impressed by meeting the folks, how dedicated they are to our country. Their American's now, US citizens. They fought for our country, they died for our country and I just want to thank you for everything you've done and everything they've done,

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and they continue to do for our country. We're a united country. We always look to the veterans to help us but, like I said earlier, many times they're short changed, and as a body we - as a country, and this body, I know we do the best we can but as a country we need to do so much more, and I just don't think we do as a country. A lot of talk but not enough has happened. So, I want to thank you.

BOB HAVEN: And Representative Vail, I'm sorry but I'm very sorry for your losses and your brother, and we just found out about three months ago the NKP, the base where I was stationed, was storing Agent Orange and spraying it, so thank God right now I'm okay but we weren't aware of it. I just found out weeks ago that we were added to the list, so that's a big problem too.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Anybody else. I just want to acknowledge that, and I don't know the bill number. In our last public hearing we had a bill related to license plate recognition for times of war, and I think if there is a way, we could intertwine this into that existing bill rather than asking service members, 400, to sign a petition. That's a little cumbersome, right, to get to find 400 people to sign and that's why we put the bill together so that we could try to go, work around the process. Okay, so thank you for your testimony.

BOB HAVEN: That would be wonderful. Thank you for your time.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Our next speaker is Bob Lyke.

BOB LYKE: Thank you Madam Co-Chairman and members of the committee. I'm wearing two hats today, and

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I'll start with the Agent Orange hat, and just kind of summarize what Mr. Gerry Wright had talked about. First of all, by way of introduction, I'm Bob Lyke, a United States Navy veteran from 1965-1969. Part of the hat I'm wearing right now is as one of the finest veteran's advocate and supporter of the Sprayed and Betrayed Agent Orange legislation and efforts that are going on throughout the country. I am an East Windsor Municipal Veteran Services Officer as well as an American Legion Service Officer. As a Veteran Service Officer, I'm experiencing an unusual amount of clients that living and then, in fact, dying from Agent Orange contamination and all the other dioxins that were used in this chemical warfare. It was used as well in Korea.

I have some Korean clients, then it was used within a certain amount of miles along the demilitarized zone. The one common denominator that I keep finding is these people don't know that they were contaminated by it and they have not put in their claims, and when they have put in their claims, they're denied because the present VA policy says you had to put in your claim within a year from discharge. It's really challenging to know the number of veterans that are living with this Agent Orange and how many are being denied.

It's frightening to hear the statistics that I hear going on all the time, 390 veterans dying a day from exposure to these terrible dioxins, and that doesn't include the next subject I'm going to talk about because the SGU aren't included in those statistics because they did fight in a war. It was all a top secret, okay. The insult to the injury I think is to find that there have been scientific studies done

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to prove that these terrible dioxins are hereditary, and they have gone through the genes into three and four generations of people. And the present legislation even does not include the men that were veterans that exposed this to their children and their grandchildren, etc. It only includes the women that were in the Army, Nurses Corp or whatever.

So, there's something that's got to be corrected. I also represent a lot of Blue Water veterans and I'm happy to say that legislation has finally been fast and its in the hands of the VA now to provide the benefits and the medical care and the monetary rewards to those affected by that. I want to thank this committee and especially Senator Maroney because he introduced this legislation. Its refreshing to find out that it got bipartisan support.

I don't know how many times I've been told, as a VSO, that Bob the only way you're going to get these veterans their benefits is through the United States Congress. So, this is a good step in the right direction. It truly is. Its refreshing to know that Senator Blumenthal sponsored the bill in the Senate S332, and that Joe Courtney sponsored it in the House, HR566. I've known Senator Anwar for years. He's my physician and cured me of pneumonia several years ago while I was misdiagnosed by another doctor. While I first introduced him to Gerry Wright, he said Bob, what can we do for these guys on a state level.

Ironically, that's the same time I introduced him to General Sar of VSGU and he asked the same question. I tie that in, in my next testimony. Anyway, he's a very caring person and to hear the response from you

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members of this committee today, I'm confident that this is going to happen and we're going to put the pressure where it belongs down there. By the way, interesting side point, being a cardiopulmonologist that Dr. Anwar is, he began to ask questions immediately about - well what about the guys affected by the burn pits in the Mideast and the guys that were subject to the burn fields, and the burning oil fields in Kuwait. So, and, I think its very much to our favor that I pretty sure he did some time and served as a doctor or an intern down at the Veterans Hospital in West Haven. That's on our side.

I have traveled to several different veterans' venues with Gerry Wright and I'm pleased to say that he considers me a trusted friend and certainly a great supporter and ally. It's all about veteran's health and veterans and Gerry is the epidemy of that. He didn't put these thousands and thousands of miles on his orange truck for himself. He's doing it because of the end results when they get passed down to Washington DC and the VA implements it are going to help all of his brothers and sisters. So I urge the resolution of this package and ask everybody to put together a presentation package like I've gotten, carry it around with Gerry's petitions in there and get it signed and get to the United States Congress to get this thing signed off on. Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you very much for your testimony. Does anybody have any questions or comments? Thank you for coming.

BOB LYKE: The next hat that I wear.

REP. BORER (115TH): Oh, um.

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BOB LYKE: Oh, do you want me to -

REP. BORER (115TH): Do you have another speech?  
[laughing]

BOB LYKE: I do.

REP. BORER (115TH): We have a three-minute limit  
and the bells rang twice. [Crosstalk]

BOB LYKE: I'm registered. Can I come back then and  
do the other three minutes? Pardon me. [Crosstalk]  
I registered.

REP. BORER (115TH): That's fine, go ahead. Just for  
this one we'll stick with the three minutes, please.

BOB LYKE: Okay, and that hat is on behalf of the  
SGU. For questioning purposes, I want to tell you  
there's a big difference in the hat that I wear and  
all the people that the SGU wear and perhaps we can  
get into that and you'll ask me a question. There's  
a tremendous difference between a combat Vietnam  
veteran and a Vietnam air veteran. The SGU, I first  
met when they joined my American Legion and helped  
just bring in the Vietnam Memorial Wall. If it  
weren't for them, and the activities that they put  
forth would never been as successful as getting as  
many people out to visit that wall and have pleasant  
memories as well as those that still had some demons  
going on in their minds, and hearts and to get over  
them. I've included in my packet to you something  
called Who Are the SGU Lao Hmong Vietnam veterans  
and I highlighted a couple of things and where I've  
highlighted that I made some interesting notes to  
myself. They lost over 35,000 people, killed in  
that secret war. We lost; we have 58,278 names on  
the Vietnam wall. They lost more than half of the

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people that we did that were armed forces with the Department of Defense.

Thousands of these people were incarcerated, they were killed, they were wounded on the battlefield during this secret war. There was the killing fields of Cambodia that a lot of people know about, not too many know about the killing fields of Lao. They were there, and a lot of them escaped and became refugees and legal citizens in the United States, paying taxes, holding jobs, okay. Thousands in the SGU did not escape and they were either taken in POW concentration camps and escaped or were killed or died there, and I'll take just a moment to recognize two of them that are with us today in case their not speak. Ms. Kimmie was an assistant nurse in the secret army and spent just short of 10 years in POW concentration camp. Over here to her right, our right, is Colonel Vastano, almost eight years of torture in a POW concentration camp.

So, I want to thank you guys for considering sending this resolution to our United States Congress people because we've - you've heard we've got the burial rights, now were going to try and get the license plate and drivers license rights to that. I have also included a testimony and I'll just highlight it quickly and be gone. Exhibit C, which is entitled the Special Guerrilla Unit, American's forgotten veterans. This was just completed by Colonel Robert Sander, retired United States Army. He is one of the most avid and knowledgeable supporters of the SGU that still lives today. He flew 397 combat missions in five different helicopters in the areas of the secret war. He's an expert. He'd loved to have been here today. He's sick. He's got some cancer issues. He's got some back issues as a

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result of the war over there. He also wrote a book that I made part of the exhibit D, the Invasion of Lao in 1971. He is writing his second book right now as we speak.

So, in summary these are the brave people that were contracted, trained and paid by the United States Government. They're wounded, killed, tortured in POW camps, they were exposed to the same chemical warfare that the US Government troops were as well as being exposed to something I just recently found out about, Yellow Rain that was sprayed by the communist. Agent Orange was sprayed by us, ourselves, okay. they became refugees, you know, legal citizens in the United States. They suffered the same mental and physical wounds that our Armed Forces are enduring and remember they're not included in the statistics of the 22 a day that are committing suicide too and they're not getting much help with the PTSD and the traumatic brain injuries. So, they have zero medical benefits. I thank you for your time and I know your going to hear from some other people too, but if you have any questions in all I've been involved, I would be happy to answer.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you so much, and I'm so glad we allowed you that additional three minutes so that you could recognize those that served and on behalf of the entire committee, I want to thank you for everything you have endured and everything that you've done to help to protect us. Thank you. Any other questions? No, okay. Thank you. Our next speaker, where is my - is Mr. Thurston.

DAN THURSTON: Good afternoon Representative Borer, members of the Veteran's Affairs Committee. I'm

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another one of the cogs in the wheels of some of the testimony that you've been hearing. I'm the Chairman for the Connecticut Veterans of Military Coalition. I'm also a Vietnam veteran. I served in Vietnam in 66, 67 and I was also in the area where the SU served. I'm also a cancer survivor and it is one of the presumption illnesses from Agent Orange. I never filed for any benefits. I had the benefit of some very good doctors that cured me many years ago, and I'm thankful for that. The - You have my written testimony and I'll just kind of briefly summarize the positions and again we're fully supporting Gerry in his efforts to get the Agent Orange Exposure Fairness Act approved by Congress and I heartedly hope that you will support the SJ18 that will give some additional force behind that. I think a lot has been said and I won't recap any further on that.

We're also supporting Senate Bill 359 and other bills that recognize the experience and training of military veterans that have received while serving in the armed forces of the United States and allowing them to carry on their skills and knowledge into our civilian workforce. There is a long way to go on this, as there are many, many occupations that can be translated and some has been brought up are very difficult to translate to civilian life. We are in support of Bill 5398 that would allow military spouses also the hold valid occupational accreditations from other states to be able to work in the state and again that would help settlement into Connecticut for military families. The Bill 5403 is stated in a testimony on Senate Bill 220 last week would exempt certain benefits and again, I think this addresses the same area and I heartily

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support that. On Senate Bill 361, the DVA programs currently in place would be impacted without provisions in this bill for allocation as sufficient funds to cover the program that has been stated earlier and I think we need to look for a better solution to transportation.

Last year we had Bill 7134 providing free public bus transportation for veterans. The buses are running allowing the veterans that can use them to get work and to appointments, you know, to take advantage of those transportation system. That does not solve the problem for rural but that is a bigger discussion that needs to be - help many of my fellow veterans to meet appointments and it can be a long day depending on what - where were coming and going to. The - with regard to Senate Bill 355, I served in Northern Lighthouse, Udon, Thailand probably 100 clicks from --

REP. BORER (115TH): Mr. Thurston I'm going to ask you to summarize.

DAN THURSTON: Yeah, about 100 clicks from where Sar and the SU operated out and they also operated out of Udorn and familiar with there presence there. They have given a lot to the Vietnam war in our efforts over there. Without them, we would've lost many more Americans in my estimation. I have given quite a lengthy background on how Laos became involved and why they served our nation. I think their outlet force, the fact that we have not recognized that thus far is to our shame but thank you very much for your time and if you have any questions, I would be more than happy to answer.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you and thank you for always coming to every public hearing and giving

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your input. [Crosstalk] We appreciate it.  
Questions? Okay, thank you. Our next speaker is  
Sar, your going to have to help me out, Phadhasack.

SAR PHADHASACK: First of all, I want to thank you  
for [inaudible 02:02:59] and respect all of you  
here. Thank you so much for support. My name is  
Sar Phadhasack. I served in US Secret Army, they  
called SU special coaly unit, served Vietnam War in  
Laos. I think a lot of people don't know about  
secret war in Laos but not many people know too,  
that's why I came here today. I'm so very honored  
and wanted to share my history with all of you. I  
served in the Vietnam War 24 years straight. I  
never come home. I will come home, welcome home  
myself because you know why I serve over there for  
24 years, I started from 1960 and trained with the  
special force for two year and they send me back to  
Laos.

The job we do over there from beginning, we recruit  
and training road work team. We put [inaudible  
02:04:13] team all along Ho Chi Minh Trail. Twenty-  
four hour we stand by. We waiting for them, we  
looking for how many convoy truck from North Vietnam  
go to the [inaudible 02:04:24]. We block Ho Chi  
Minh Trail. We block [inaudible 02:04:29] division  
in Laos. During the Vietnam war we have no  
[inaudible 02:04:35] in Laos. All the north  
Vietnamese. I will tell you why, 1962 Vietnam in  
Laos. Laos already Geneva Convention at court. No  
[inaudible 02:04:49] troop in Laos but why not  
Vietnamese in Laos. See we cut borderline between  
Laos in North Vietnamese, in China. They can come  
today. They pull out tomorrow. They said, no we  
don't go in Laos. After that 1975, not many  
[inaudible 02:05:08], one million people. Why?

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That's why CIA or American troop not in Laos, that's why they train us. CIA, I'm sorry they [inaudible 02:05:24] to the bottom, everything. We work for US Government. It called US Secret Army served Vietnam War in Laos. That's our camp. We block Ho Chi Minh Trail. We rescue American pilot.

Our boss number 1 CIA, number 2 airport. We contact them, we drop the bomb in Laos. A lot of people said during the Vietnam war, why American drop a lot of bomb and allowed to destroy of Laos country. They said wait minute, you know how much it costs one bomb, a lot of money. We drop the bomb for reason. We dropped [inaudible 02:06:05] in Laos. We dropped a convoy truck because [inaudible 02:06:10] bomb. We work all along Ho Chi Minh Trail. We were in Laos, myself. My first combat term in North Vietnam 1964. Three month and 25 day in jungle. What I do every day, I go rescue [inaudible 02:06:29] during the Vietnam war in Ho Chi Minh Trail. I go over there for three months and rescue them out. How many American pilot we rescue them out, 300? We have record in Vietnam War. Buffalo and Buffalo fired together then met through the grass. You know why, American and North Vietnam they fight together. In the end, unfortunately, we lose everything. We lose the country. They grab all royal family [inaudible 02:07:10]. King and Queen, they killed them all. [inaudible 02:07:17] my boss. [inaudible 02:07:21]. I have two POW with me here. One lady over there, [inaudible 02:07:27]. She [inaudible 02:07:28] for POW and Colonel [inaudible 02:07:30].

The one we send him try to hold American troop in [inaudible 02:07:38]. I think a lot of people would know about [inaudible 02:07:44]. Yea, we send him

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down [inaudible 02:07:50]. One [inaudible 02:07:55] in Thailand. We landing in the [inaudible 02:08:01] go down there by helicopter [inaudible 02:08:55] from NKP, the one Bob Haven [inaudible 02:08:10]. We landing between, you see the map. I have over here, Route 9 from Laos direct through the [inaudible 02:08:15]. We land in between on a left and right in Route 9, and then not [inaudible 02:08:26] 101 airborne. 101 airborne can kill 174 people, that's why headquarter in [inaudible 02:08:33] in Thailand (inaudible 02:08:36). Whatever you guys can help us out, that's why we [inaudible 02:08:39]. We landing on foot, one left, one right and [inaudible 02:08:45] coming after you from [inaudible 02:08:49]. They don't want deal with SU because SU [inaudible 02:08:55] and they turn around to the vet, they open the hole for 101 airborne to get out, go to [inaudible 02:09:00]. We served them [inaudible 02:09:03]. One day he loses 64 people and [inaudible 02:09:08].

REP. BORER (115TH): Mr. Phadhasack I'm going to ask you to summarize your testimony.

SAR PHADHASACK: This one here I talking about [inaudible 02:09:19]. After that [inaudible 02:09:23] POW almost 10 year. How many our POW got killed in a POW camp, many, many. I can't tell you. Even my father, missing in action, 1964. We couldn't find body at all. Yeah, this one I'm happy and appreciation for all share my history with all of you.

REP. BORER (115TH): [inaudible 02:09:53] would you like to speak also or do you want an interpret.

SAR PHADHASACK: He cannot speak English. That's why I share you my - I came here in 1983 but I came

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late. [inaudible 02:10:08]. I work two jobs support my family, yeah, so. This country I still owe this country a lot. This country keeps me alive [inaudible 02:10:18]. Thank you so much. Right now, I'm a veteran. [inaudible 02:10:25] airborne, American Legion, AUSA, [inaudible 02:10:33] because I appreciate, I'm honored. Right now, I still [inaudible 02:10:38] US [inaudible 02:10:40] for repair our country. This is my country. I don't want anybody coming here [inaudible 02:10:47] our country. I don't care about me. How many years I got live? I care about my kids, my grandkids, my great-grandchildren. I have three great-grandkids. How they going to survival in this country? People do not realize they come here; they want everything. Give me more food, give more money. Come on, you [inaudible 02:11:05] country, what they going to give to you. Thank you for this. [Crosstalk]

REP. BORER (115TH): So, you were there 24 years from 1960 to 1984, is that right?

SAR PHADHASACK: 1983, yep.

REP. BORER (115TH): 1983 and then came here right to Connecticut.

SAR PHADHASACK: Yep, because after 75, I still [inaudible 02:11:24], CIA. Two of them still were here, one in Ohio and one in Arizona. [inaudible 02:11:33]. He's served in Vietnam war. He retired from Green Beret too, yeah.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you so much. Thank you for all of your service. Thank you for all of your sacrifices, and I know how important this bill is and we're really going to take a hard look at this bill. Representative Yaccarino.

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REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you Madam Chair. Thank you General Sar and thank you for all the Laotian veterans that really fought side-by-side for American lives and our freedom and your freedom, and the thing that bothers me the most is that you have done so much for us and they can never go back to their home country. They would be executed, and they become Americans and they served and saved so many of our lives - so many of Americans lives and its just a testament to your dedication on the Ho Chi Minh Trail laying the devices and protecting our airman and our soldiers and sailors, and I just want to thank you for that, and anything we can do to help you, we owe it to you. You've done so much for us and I'm proud to get to know you and really have to thank Mr. Havens because I wouldn't have gotten to known any of you if it wasn't for Bob reaching out to me, and this great committee listen to you and thank you so much. To all your friends and your countrymen, and now you're an American, so thank you.

SAR PHADHASACK: Thank you so much.

REP. BORER (115TH): I want to thank Representative Yaccarino because you have been educating us about this all along, so its been a lot of great information so that we can make some --.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): It's really Bob to thank.

REP. BORER (115TH): Well you were the channel to, you brought the information to us, so thank you very much and thank you very much for all you've done.

SAR PHADHASACK: Thank you, thank you Ma'am.

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REP. BORER (115TH): Our next speaker is Linda Kowalski. I don't see Linda. So were going to move right on to Isabelle Blank.

ISABELLE BLANK: Good afternoon, my name is Isabelle Blank. I'm Senior Manager of the External Affairs at Yankee Institute for Public Policy and were testifying in support of House Bill 5398, 5396 and Senate Bill 359. So, I have - you have my written testimony, so I'll just summarize. So, Connecticut is the only state in the country without a broad law protecting the rights of military spouses to work in chosen profession, and that will be addressed in House Bill 5396. So, this bill help Connecticut join the rest of the country basically, the rest of the states in the union to ease the transition of military families when they move to our state, and actually 50 percent of military spouses are in professions that require licensing, so it's impassible for this population.

I want to address lines 8 through 11 in the bill, so those lines would require that the state that the spouse comes from has licensing requirements that meet or exceed Connecticut's requirements or Connecticut standards and I would ask to eliminate that requirement and replace it with - oh sorry, just eliminate it and have reciprocity for all states. I understand that might not be politically feasible, so my next recommendation after that would be to replace it with comparable experience. So instead of, um, if they come from a state with licensing that doesn't meet Connecticut's requirements, that they have a certain amount of years of experience that could substitute for the licensing. So, someone with you know 20 years as a nurse but licensing that doesn't comply with

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Connecticut has enough experience to replace the licensing requirement. So, in terms of House Bill 5398 and Senate Bill 359, we're also supportive of those bills.

We believe that the state should never get in the way of someone using the skills that they have to earn a living. So, we support those bills because they help veterans apply the skills that gained in the military or new jobs, and we also would suggest similar legislation for all Connecticut residents in the future but understand that its important to start here with veterans, and I can answer any questions.

REP. BORER (115TH): Great, thank you. Does the [inaudible 02:15:50] have any studies around this issue?

ISABELLE BLANK: We don't have studies that we've personally conducted but there's a lot of studies from other organizations that I can forward to you, as well as the USDOL.

REP. BORER (115TH): That would be great. Thank you. Any comments, questions? Okay, thank you for your testimony. Our next speaker is Louise Decoco. Okay, she left you. Okay. Then last but not least, is Karl Crump. Karl, he left, okay. Okay, well then that concludes our public hearing. I want to thank you all for coming and for all of your information and your support so that we can make some decisions for our next meeting where we'll be voting on our bills. Thank you.