

**The Enlisted Association  
Of the National Guard  
Of the United States**

**Statement for the Record**

**United States Senate  
Committee on Veterans Affairs**

**On**

**“Proposed Legislation”**

**May 22, 2019**

***The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States  
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Washington, DC 20001***

**[www.eangus.org](http://www.eangus.org)**

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS) was created in 1970 by a group of senior Non-Commissioned Officers. It was formally organized and incorporated in 1972 in Jackson, Mississippi, with the goal of increasing the voice of enlisted persons in the National Guard on Capitol Hill for enlisted National Guard issues. Beginning with twenty-three states, EANGUS now represents all 54 states and territories, with a constituency base of over 414,000, hundreds of thousands of family members, as well as thousands of retired members.

Headquartered and with offices in Washington, D.C., EANGUS is a long-time member of The Military Coalition (TMC) and is actively engaged with the Guard/Reserve Committee, the Health Care Committee, and the Veterans Committee. EANGUS often partners with other National Guard related associations such as the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), the Adjutants General Association of the United States (AGAUS) and the Reserve Officers Association (ROA) to pursue common legislative goals and outcomes.

EANGUS is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to promoting the status, welfare and professionalism of enlisted members of the National Guard by supporting legislation that provides adequate staffing, pay, benefits, entitlements, equipment and installations for the National Guard.

The legislative goals of EANGUS are published annually. The goals and objectives are established through the resolution process, with resolutions passed by association delegates at the annual conference. From these resolutions come the issues that EANGUS will pursue in Congress, the Department of Defense, and in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

President – Command Sergeant Major Karen Craig, U.S. Army (Ret)  
Executive Director – Sergeant Major Frank Yoakum, US Army (Ret)  
Legislative Director – Daniel Elkins

## **Mr. Daniel Elkins**

Daniel Elkins is the Legislative Director for the Enlisted Association of the National Guard (EANGUS) and the Veterans Education Project, and is a currently serving Special Operations Soldier in the Army National Guard. Mr. Elkins has over fifteen years of experience in directing, managing, and staffing operations and reaching strategic objectives.

Working on behalf of Veterans Mr. Elkins engages Congress, the White House, and key stakeholders daily. Furthermore, Mr. Elkins is a regular member of the Veterans Roundtable Policy board at the Veterans Administration.

Mr. Elkins' primary duties at EANGUS included directing Congressional outreach, engaging in policy reform, ensuring the protection of military benefits, and leading nationwide grassroots advocacy for Veterans. Before working for EANGUS, Mr. Elkins was the Congressional Liaison and Legislative Associate for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW). At the VFW, Mr. Elkins' portfolio included legislative issues and Economic Opportunity. He focused specifically on the accessibility of benefits for Servicemembers, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, the National Guard, and Military Engagements.

Mr. Elkins' close ties with Congress, the Departments of Defense, Education, Labor, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and Veterans Affairs often place him at the forefront of policy decisions that affect Servicemembers and Veterans.

Mr. Elkins is a proud combat Veteran, still serving in 19th Special Forces Group Army National Guard. Before working as an advocate for Veterans and serving in the military, Mr. Elkins spent five years working overseas to solve complex issues related to human trafficking. During his time abroad, he worked across multilingual and cultural barriers with local and national governments in South America, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

Mr. Elkins is originally from Western Maryland and currently resides in Washington, D.C. with his wife, Lauren.

### ***S. 123: Ensuring Quality Care for Veterans Act***

The Enlisted Association of the National of the United States (EANGUS) supports S. 123, *Ensuring Quality Care for Veterans Act*, which provides additional oversight over Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) appointees.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is one of the largest federal agencies, and VHA's task is monumental in scope and need. We are therefore supportive of providing a contracted third party, independent of the federal government, to review VHA appointees who have had their license terminated for cause by a State licensing board for care or services rendered at non-VHA hospitals, and to review the quality of care provided to Veterans by such individuals. If it is found that the quality of care or services provided to Veterans fell below the standards of care, EANGUS agrees that such Veterans should be notified by the Secretary of VA.

### ***S. 221: Department of Veterans Affairs Provider Accountability Act***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is supportive of S. 221, *Department of Veterans Affairs Provider Accountability Act*.

Providing additional accountability to section 7401(1) employees will improve quality of care for Veterans, as current accountability measures do not go far enough to curb inadmissible conduct and poor performance of appointed employees. EANGUS believes VHA should have more power to discipline unacceptable behavior of 7401(1) employees, and extending additional recourses such as reporting to the National Practitioner Data Bank and State Licensing Boards will strengthen the accountability necessary to ensure quality of care for our Veterans.

### ***S. 318: VA Newborn Emergency Treatment Act***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States currently does not have a stance on S. 318, *VA Newborn Emergency Treatment Act*.

### ***S. 450: Veterans Improved Access and Care Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is supportive of S. 450, *Veterans Improved Access and Care Act of 2019*.

Currently, there are not enough VHA providers to care for our nation's Veterans, and VHA providers are not yet geographically diverse enough for Veterans to receive appropriate care. The creation of a pilot program to expedite the hiring process of new providers to no longer than 60 days, and for this pilot program to focus on geographically diverse regions that face hiring shortages of providers, will do much to meet the medical needs of Veterans. EANGUS believes this expedited onboarding process can be accomplished without compromising on necessary procedures, such as certifying the medical provider's credentials, performing a background check, assessing their health status, and other necessary actions that ensure these medical providers will provide the best care to Veterans.

### ***S. 514: Deborah Sampson Act***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is supportive of S. 514, the *Deborah Sampson Act*.

Women Veterans are a growing population, and currently VA facilities and staff are not equipped to provide quality care necessary for women Veterans. This legislation plans to improve women Veterans transition and care in commonsense ways, like providing additional legal counsel, improved VA care and updated facilities, and better data tracking and analysis. EANGUS applauds that this legislation provides preventative measures against homelessness, unemployment, and lack of health care with expanded transition programs, and plans to implement specialized program managers for women Veterans at VA facilities.

### ***S. 524: Department of Veterans Affairs Tribal Advisory Committee Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States does not have a stance on S. 524, *Department of Veterans Affairs Tribal Advisory Committee Act of 2019*.

### ***S. 711: Care and Readiness Enhancement for Reservist Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is highly supportive of S. 711, the *Care and Readiness Enhancement for Reservist Act of 2019*.

Of the nearly 20 Veteran suicides daily, on average five are from the Reserve components, and three have never been federally activated, and are ineligible to receive VA mental health care. EANGUS is currently in the process of finalizing a Memorandum of Agreement with VHA to combat suicide in the National Guard and Reserve components, and we recognize that mental health care must be made available to these Servicemembers, regardless of their Veteran status. The *Care and Readiness Enhancement for Reservist Act of 2019* provides the legislative fix necessary to care for these overlooked Servicemembers who are currently unable to receive the mental health care they deserve.

### ***S. 746: Department of Veterans Affairs Website Accessibility Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is generally supportive of S. 746, *Department of Veterans Affairs Website Accessibility Act of 2019*.

It is important that disabled Veterans be able to navigate the various websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs and be able to access the information they need. However, we believe that VA should consult with various Veteran Service Organizations while updating their websites, and should not neglect the vast amount of expertise these organizations can provide VA in order to make sure these updates do not create new problems for Servicemembers and Veterans.

## ***S. 785: Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is generally supportive of S. 785, *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019*.

EANGUS encourages the exploration of alternative treatment options and partnering with non-VA mental health providers, but desire to see these treatments and care extended to National Guard and Reserve members who have never been federally activated.

Section 101, Expansion of Health Care Coverage for Veterans, uses the limiting term of “active service,” that only applies to active duty or full-time National Guard duty. We ask that the committee change the proposed insert to Section 101, “(B) to any veteran during the one-year period following the discharge or release of the veteran from active military, naval, or air service; and” be changed to insert after the word service “and active status; and” which would include reserve component members leaving a participating reserve position as defined by Title 10, Section 101.

We are highly supportive of tracking suicide-related data, and disaggregating data by potential contributing factors, such as traumatic brain injury and anxiety. Additionally, we support this legislation’s aim to increase mental health assessments, but desire to see mental health assessments provided during MEPS pre-examinations in order to identify at-risk applicants, and screen out high-risk applicants.

EANGUS supports this legislation, but we are concerned with the feasibility of its implementation. We suggest that it be implemented in incremental, achievable measures to evaluate its efficacy.

## ***S. 805: Veteran Debt Fairness Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is supportive of S. 805, the *Veteran Debt Fairness Act of 2019*.

For a variety of reasons, including delays in processing dependency changes, and communication errors between IT systems, VA sometimes makes overpayments to Veterans. Because these payments are automatic and monthly, these overpayments add up significantly over time, and they are not the fault of the Veteran. The *Veteran Debt Fairness Act of 2019* will limit VA’s ability to recoup overpayments only when it is the fault of the Veteran, and VA may withhold no more than 25 percent of a Veteran’s monthly benefit check—as opposed to withholding entire monthly checks from Veterans on fixed incomes. This provision safeguards Veterans and their families who depend upon their monthly benefits, while incentivizing VA to fix their erroneous data systems. Further, we support that this legislation requires VA to perform yearly audits in order to eliminate the systematic errors that cause overpayments.

### ***S. 850: Highly Rural Veteran Transportation Program Extension Act***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States currently does not have a stance on S. 850, the *Highly Rural Veteran Transportation Program Extension Act*.

### ***S. 857: Increase Special Provisions for Medal of Honor Recipients***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is highly supportive of S. 857, *Increase Special Provisions for Medal of Honor Recipients*. These heroes deserve all the recognition and support we can give, and increasing their monthly pensions to \$3,000 monthly will do much to alleviate undue economic stress.

### ***S. 980: Homeless Veterans Prevention Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is supportive of S. 980, the *Homeless Veterans Prevention Act of 2019*.

Alleviating economic stress for homeless Veterans and their dependents via Per Diem support allows for the exploration of permanent solutions, and ensures these Veterans have the ability to seek and access to further resources—whether that is mental, physical, or legal help. Private and public partnerships to provide legal counsel to homeless Veterans and their families provides another means of protection and stability, and will potentially prevent further homelessness among at-risk Veterans in the midst of financial or marital distress.

EANGUS recommends that National Guard and members of the Reserve components be disaggregated in collected data, as the nature of their homelessness differs from the active duty population. Understanding the differences between active duty population and the Reserve Component population will enable us to determine correlative factors that contribute to each population's homelessness, and to draft better legislation to strengthen preventative measures.

### ***S. 1101: Better Examiner Standards and Transparency for Veterans Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States supports S. 1101, *Better Examiner Standards and Transparency for Veterans Act of 2019*.

When evaluated for disability ratings, Veterans should be confident their examiner is a licensed health care provider that is professionally qualified to conduct an accurate analysis and give trustworthy recommendations. Anything less would be an insult to these Veterans.

## **S. 1154: Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Advisory Committee Act**

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard is generally supportive of S. 1154, the *Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Advisory Committee Act*.

Generally, members of the National Guard are not seen at military facilities, and it becomes incumbent on National Guard members to ensure their medical records from civilian providers are placed in their military medical records—something rarely done. Our understanding is that, as GENESIS matures, the plan is for it to include the EHR from several private commercial health plans for even more access to civilian medical records by DOD and VA. It must include Guard and Reserve members to be effective. EANGUS therefore recommends that National Guard and Reserve Component be represented on the EHR advisory committee to ensure that our members' medical records are properly integrated.

## ***S. Janey Ensminger Act of 2019***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States does not have a stance on the *Janey Ensminger Act of 2019*.

## ***S. Pay Educational Assistance etc.***

The Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States is highly supportive of this yet untitled bill submitted by Senator Cassidy.

In the wake of multiple closures of institutions of higher education, Student Veterans have had no recourse for reimbursement, nor the necessary benefits to transition into another program. This piece of legislation will empower the Secretary of VA to continue to pay subsistence allowances and educational assistance for up to eight weeks, greatly aiding Student Veterans to weather temporary closures, or provide them the resources necessary to transition and persist at another institution of higher education.