

## **\*\* OPENING STATEMENT \*\***

- Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us today to hear views from the Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans service organizations on 21 bills pending before the Committee.
- Even before the pandemic, organizations working to support our nation's most vulnerable veterans told us they needed bigger lifeboats as they could not fully support the existing population of veterans experiencing homelessness.
- In April, we hosted a roundtable with VSOs and homeless veterans' advocates.
- We heard firsthand about the challenges they face and facilitated a productive conversation with VA, HUD, and the Department of Labor about what needs to be done to address them.
- Included on today's agenda is my bill, the Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act. Every section of this legislation came out of requests made during that roundtable.
- This bill makes permanent COVID-related safety nets that have become essential to providing the most effective care and support to unhoused veterans and their families.

- These requests are not wishlist items, but concrete changes advocates have said are absolutely necessary in the fight to effectively end veteran homelessness.
- In fact, the Department is on record requesting some of the items in my bill from Congress.
- Given this, it is disappointing that VA has not provided views on my bill for this hearing despite having had the text since May 24.
- My expectation is that VA will address this delay in views expeditiously.
- Also on our agenda today is S.1467, the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act, a bill I worked on with Senator Sullivan that expands the research on alternative treatments for veterans who suffer from the seen and unseen wounds of war.
- A survey conducted by The American Legion tells us that 22 percent of veterans who responded already use cannabis to treat a medical condition.

- Our bill will help VA get the necessary data to fully evaluate this treatment and educate veterans on the outcomes of using medicinal cannabis to treat certain conditions.
- I want to thank our witnesses again for being here today.
- If we work together, we can finally fulfill our promise to our veterans and reassure them that when fight for us, we will fight for them.