



**Joint Written Testimony of
The Honorable Tim S. McClain
Chairman, Board of Directors
and
Mr. James Lorraine
President & CEO
America's Warrior Partnership
Augusta, GA**

**Before the
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs**

August 1, 2018

Testimony in Support of:

- **"Discussion Draft on Transition Assistance reform"**
- **S. ____ (Cassidy), An Act to establish a program to award grants to coordinate the provision of suicide prevention**
- **S. 1990 (Tester/Blumenthal/Hirono), Dependency and Indemnity Compensation Improvement Action of 2017**
- **S. 2485 (Sullivan), Medal of Honor Surviving Spouses Recognition Act of 2018**

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on several pieces of proposed legislation that offer the potential to have tremendous impact on our nation's veterans. I am Tim McClain and have had the honor of serving our country on active duty for more than 20 years as a Navy Surface Warfare Officer and JAG Corps Officer, and the privilege of serving as a former General Counsel for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

I am currently the Chairman of the Board of Directors of America's Warrior Partnership, a nonprofit organization serving veterans and their families. Our mission at America's Warrior Partnership is to empower communities to empower veterans. Our approach to the mission takes many forms, but it starts with connecting community organizations with local veterans to understand their unique needs and situations. After gaining this knowledge, we connect local veteran-serving organizations with the appropriate resources, services and partners that the veteran requires. Our ultimate goal is to create a better quality of life for all veterans.

Our Community Integration model provides the framework for organizations to conduct proactive outreach to veterans and holistically serve all of their needs. We have seen incredible results from this

model, which has established relationships with more than 42,000 veterans since February 2014 in our eight Affiliate Communities across the country. Proactive outreach is having a tremendous impact on these veterans. More than 90% of our veterans self-report that America's Warrior Partnership's proactive engagement and support give them a greater level of overall satisfaction, and they believe their community really cares about their well-being. America's Warrior Partnership's Community Integration model works.

Providing testimony with me today is the president and CEO of America's Warrior Partnership, Mr. Jim Lorraine, who is also a veteran of our great country having served for 22 years as an Air Force Officer and Flight Nurse. Prior to founding America's Warrior Partnership, Mr. Lorraine served as the founding director of the United States Special Operations Command Care Coalition, a wounded warrior advocacy organization recognized as the gold standard in supporting more than 4,000 special operations force wounded, ill, or injured and their families. He has also served as Special Assistant for Warrior and Family Support to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, during which time he transformed the Chairman's "Sea of Goodwill" concept into a strategy. Mr. Lorraine will provide America's Warrior Partnership's testimony regarding four pieces of proposed legislation.

Thank you, Mr. McClain. In my testimony today, I will first address the draft of the proposed legislation on Transition Assistance Program reform.

We believe this reform establishes a very important goal for improving services to our nation's warriors and that, in theory, it could have a very positive impact on veterans and the community. We fully support and embrace a holistic approach to serving veterans' needs, as evidenced by our mission and work at America's Warrior Partnership. We have seen first-hand the positive effects that proactive outreach has on veterans, and we are pleased that this reform both acknowledges this fact and empowers organizations to conduct this outreach. Specifically, including communities in the Transition Assistance Program reform through the proposed grant program will be revolutionary in the ability to locally transition veterans and measure long-term outcomes. The draft legislation is the first comprehensive legislative approach to assisting military members in their transition to civilian life. All of the requirements in the draft are sorely needed. However, we would like to state how important collaboration among the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Labor (DoL) and the VA is to the success of this reform. Each department brings their strength to transition, but we strongly feel DoL is in the best position to administer the community interface since the path to success is employment. With greater DoL emphasis during pre-transition training, the end result will prove measurable and impactful.

Additionally, the notion of these departments working together to implement the Transition Assistance Program has been the mission for many years, but it has not proven as effective as intended. Strong engagement and support from the DoD, DoL and the VA collectively is essential to achieving the goal of real and lasting reform in warrior transition. I want to reiterate that we at America's Warrior Partnership fully support the goal of this reform, and respectfully offer our constructive input based on experience in order to make this reform even stronger by stressing the importance of collaboration, a principle that also forms the foundation of our own organization's work.

The second piece of legislation I would like to comment on concerns the establishment of a grant program to support suicide prevention services. The VA reported earlier this year that, on average, 20

veterans die by suicide every day. This is an alarming public health concern that affects every community in the country, and this legislation is a step in the right direction of ensuring veteran-serving professionals have the means to proactively help at-risk veterans. The financial support offered by this program will bolster the work of researchers who are currently studying the indicators and risk factors of suicide and self-harm among veterans. Our team at America's Warrior Partnership is collaborating on one such study with University of Alabama researchers through funding from the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation. This project, called Operation Deep Dive, is the first of its kind to evaluate the role that community environments and less-than-honorable discharges may have in suicide among veterans, among other factors. The goal of the study is to provide actionable insights that can guide the development of effective programs for reducing self-harm among veterans. The findings provided by projects such as Operation Deep Dive, combined with the support of this grant program, are critical elements that will empower communities to help veterans live and thrive long after their service is complete.

My third testimony addresses Senate Bill 1990, which would increase dependency and indemnity compensation to surviving family members of veterans who were rated totally disabled at time of death. Military families serve in their own way by supporting their loved ones both during active duty and in their transition to civilian life. The service and sacrifice of our veterans may at times result in a disability that puts significant strain on the veteran and their family members who care for them. Our team at America's Warrior Partnership and the affiliate communities that we collaborate with understand these sacrifices, which is why our holistic approach to serving veterans is always inclusive of their families as well. This bill has the potential to offer a lifeline to the families of disabled veterans who need it most.

Finally, I would like to comment on Senate Bill 2485, which would provide payment of a special pension to the surviving spouse of a deceased Medal of Honor recipient. Our nation's Medal of Honor recipients go above and beyond the call of duty, and we as a nation owe them nothing less in return. America's Warrior Partnership is honored to have two Medal of Honor recipients serve on our board of directors. Their integrity and example continue to guide our mission of empowering communities to empower veterans, and the support provided by this legislation can help the families of Medal of Honor recipients continue their legacy long after their service is complete.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on these critical areas and will now let Mr. McClain conclude our testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Lorraine. Chairman Isakson, thank you for inviting us to provide testimony today. We are both honored and pleased to have this opportunity. Our mission is the same as the mission of this committee: to ensure that all veterans are taken care of and provided the benefits that they have rightfully earned through their service to our country. There is much work to be done, and we look forward to continue collaborating with the Department of Veterans Affairs and our partners across the country to empower veterans from all walks of life as they transition to civilian life. Thank you again for the invitation to share our testimony today.