

Melissa M. Twine
USAF Veteran (1988-1998)
Disable Veteran, 40%
Surviving Spouse of Capt. Phillip B. Twine, USAF Deceased 8-7-02

Testimony by Melissa Twine before a field hearing of the
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
On the State of Veterans Employment in Ohio
Columbus, Ohio
21 Nov 2017

First, I would like to thank Sen. Brown for inviting me to participate in today's hearing by sharing my experiences with the VA departments here in Ohio, both in Cincinnati and in Dayton.

A little about myself: I was brought up in the military way of life, as my father retired from the USAF. When I was 17, I entered the USAF and served for 10 years. I separated from the AF in 1998 and am a Disabled Veteran of over 40% service related. My husband, who was ADAAF died at Langley AFB, VA in Aug of 2002. I then gained a new title or label of a Surviving Spouse. Our 4th child arrived 3 weeks after his death. I moved myself and all 4 children home to Ohio.

Before separating from the AF, I gained an Associate's Degree in Allied Health Sciences. I then returned to school at the University of Cincinnati, where I earned my Undergraduate Degree in Biology, pre-med while taking care of 3 children; my husband was sent overseas without the family during this timeframe, also serving a tour with the United Nations in the Western Sahara. The VA helped me achieve this degree from UC via the VocRehab Program for DAVs.

I have been an advocate in supporting the initiatives brought forth by Sen Brown and many others for increasing Survivor's Benefits in Education via the VA's Fry Scholarship Program and hope to go back to school to continue my education that was halted when I became a widow raising 4 children alone.

Regarding access to VA Healthcare in OH, I personally try to avoid the VA system at all costs. When I did try to utilize the VA system several years ago, I experienced only hassle and frustration. I quickly learned that using my Survivor's benefits for TRICARE was much easier and allowed for many more options, even though it came with a higher monetary cost to myself. Any attempt to see the VA medical provider was met with long wait times and a run-around when attempting to get medications for Diabetes, Hypertension, and high cholesterol. When I did get an appointment, I waited for a long time through a confusing process of lab testing and shuffling around through several hallways and departments.....all the while being handed donuts and coffee from a push cart by volunteers.....not exactly what Diabetics and patients with heart disease should be eating!

I have a very close friend that tried to get help for substance addiction last year; a former Marine. He was put through a month-long process of 3 appointments to different departments and tons of paperwork only to be told that because his wife had insurance, he did not qualify for VA help.....something that could have been identified up front and not have caused a delay

in him obtaining treatment he so desperately needed. This reiterated to me that avoiding the VA Medical system is a no-brainer.

I will continue to assist in the fight for:

- increased awareness in the VA Medical System struggle
- fairness in Survivor Benefits for all Surviving Family Members
- and increased availability to all Veterans benefits that we earned while serving our country

Again, thank you for allowing me to appear and testify today to help achieve the previously mentioned topics. Thank you, Sen. Brown, for inviting me to appear today and for all of the work that you and your office does to help the military and their families.