

**Statement of Jaime Areizaga-Soto
Nominee for Chairman, Board of Veterans' Appeals
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

**Senate Veterans Affairs Committee
Hearing to Consider Pending Nominations
July 27, 2022**

Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, and Committee Members,

I am humbled and honored to appear in front of you to offer my record and commitment to serve my fellow Veterans as the Chair of the Board of Veterans' Appeals. I am grateful to President Biden for his confidence in nominating me and congratulate Ms. Anjali Chaturvedi on her nomination. I want to thank my own Senators Kaine and Warner for their excellent service, leadership, and active mentorship.

I would not be here but for the sacrifice and lessons of so many. First and foremost, my mother, Baldamina Soto, an elementary school teacher, and my father, José Francisco Areizaga, a Korean War Veteran and lifelong public servant both of whom flew from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to join us. Their lives have been committed to service, love, and faith. Through their sacrifice they raised and educated four children, including my brother Javier who is also here. I want to recognize my son, José Juan, who serves as my inspiration to do everything I can to leave a world which is safer for democracy and where we are more respectful to each other and to nature.

I want to thank my teachers, professors, and mentors inside and outside a classroom for their lessons and shared wisdom. They all instilled in me a vocation of service. My life-long focus as a citizen soldier, international lawyer, and public official has been service to others. Since turning 18 and for almost 35 years, I have served in the Army and the National Guard. At present, I serve in uniform as the Deputy General

Counsel at the National Guard Bureau. I knew the importance of the Guard to our common good. The last six years have demonstrated the superb service that the Guard does when our citizens are most vulnerable due to threats at home or abroad.

I want to thank retired General William Navas for his mentorship in the National Guard and retired Colonel Victor Tall, who was my first supervisor when I joined the Army JAG Corps in the 1990's and who is here today. I also thank those who have served as mentors in Veterans affairs, like retired Admiral John Harvey, former Fleet Forces Commander, and with whom I tagged as Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs in Virginia. Finally, I want to thank the White House Fellow community for our dedication to servant leadership, bipartisanship, and public service. They are represented by my classmate and fellow Guardsman, retired Air Force General Bobby Doorenboos.

Since childhood, I have been inspired by the selfless sacrifice of so many Veterans. Almost 20 of my relatives have served in the military such as my uncle, who like so many Puerto Ricans fought valiantly in Korea. It is our sacred duty to support our Veterans after they have served and sacrificed for all of us. My experience as an attorney in the private, public and military arenas for over 25 years leading large legal organizations will enable me, if confirmed, to continue the substantial improvements made at the Board.

My leadership mentality follows the Army principle of "Mission First, People Always!". I complement it with my own "One Team, One Fight!" approach so I will center my leadership of the almost 1,200 highly capable and dedicated federal public servants at the Board with the sacred mission of ensuring each Veteran is cared for. I

am inspired by Secretary McDonough's commitment for increased access with better outcomes at the VA and to eliminate the functional backlog at the Board.

I commend the Committee for adopting the Appeals Modernization Act. The Board implemented the AMA in February 2019, and the implementation appears to have been very successful. Although the AMA has been a game-changer, there is still much to be done. The PACT Act will increase the number of claims appealed to the Board. If confirmed, I will promptly integrate the 22 just-announced new Veteran Law Judges to ensure a dramatic increase in the number of claims heard and decided.

In sum, I am a dedicated public servant who has worn the uniform for almost 35 years, committed to our key heroes, those who have volunteered, signed up, and pledged to offer their lives anywhere and at any time to defend the rest of us and the Constitution. We have a sacred duty to care for each Veteran, particularly those who have been wounded or paid the ultimate sacrifice. I hope to have the distinct honor to serve them as the next Chair of the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

Thank you Chairman Tester, Senator Moran, and members of the Committee.