

Terry Poaipuni

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Aloha Mr. Chairman and Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs;

My name is Terry Lee Poaipuni and I am a wife of a Viet Nam Veteran. I was born and raised on the East side of Maui, in a place called Hana. I have worked for Maui's Native Hawaiian Healthcare System, Hui No Ke Ola Pono for 19 years. I will refer to Hana as East Maui because the district encompasses a bigger area than Hana. The number of Veterans in East Maui is seventy five plus and this is not counting the National and Coast Guard Veterans. I'm sure there are more Veterans out there that I've missed.

Nearly five years ago the State, Office of Veteran Services would send William Staton to Hana once a month to assist the Veterans living in East Maui. Ten years ago, a Registered Nurse from the Veteran Clinic used to come to Hana Medical Center to see Veteran patients. Presently the State, Office of Veterans Services does not come to East Maui. I've spoken to our State representative and due to the State economic constraints services by the State Office of Veterans Services were cut. Tamicko Jackson, who has taken William Staton's place is the only person employed by the State who is able to assist Veterans from Maui, Molokai, & Lanai. Tamiko Jackson sees several of our East Maui Veterans who drive out to Central Maui for their appointments and I'm not sure how long Tamicko Jackson will be there. The unfortunate thing is the Veterans become familiar (or ma'a as we say in Hawaiian) to someone like Tamiko and then she gets replaced. This replacement only makes it harder and frustrating for the Veteran. The accessibility of services to East Maui Veterans is a major problem.

Counselors Ernie Matsukawa & Ipo Messmore has made the Veteran Center in Lunalilo Building a safe place for Veterans wanting to gather and share experiences. Ernie & Ipo Messmore does an awesome job of counseling our Veterans and we need more people like them. I find the Veterans, who gather there, have a lot of knowledge and information they are willing to share. This is what is missing in the system. That willingness to share with the Veteran of his or her benefits without them guessing and feeling like they need to beg. Maybe this is what the system is set up to do.

Hui No Ke Ola Pono, the Native Hawaiian Healthcare System with an office in Central Maui and a satellite office in East Maui have recently begun working with Veterans on the island of Maui. Hui No Ke Ola Pono, have included on our organization intake form a portion for the Veteran to fill. This will identify the Veteran and give us the opportunity to advocate for them. Clay Park, of Papa Ola Lokahi, has been instrumental for starting the Veteran advocate services at Hui No Ke Ola Pono. Clay Park has been helping the Veterans on Maui to explain how to fill out the Veterans Benefit Administration forms. .

In closing, I would like to know how East Maui can get assistance from the Veteran Benefits Administration. My understanding is that Joseph Thompson can assist Veterans with the application process. Can Joseph Thompson come to East Maui? Is there a way that a telecommunication site can be set up so Veterans can access services from East Maui?

The Veterans need to feel like they are part of the system that they fought for and not a burden to it. Mahalo and thank you for your time.