

David T. Ferreira

Honorable Daniel K Akaka  
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

My name is David T Ferreira, I am a retired Sergeant First Class with 30 years in the Hawaii Army National Guard, of which I served 24 years on Active Guard (AGR) as a Senior Human Resource Sergeant. I am presently the Family Assistance Specialist, Hawaii Army National Guard for the island of Hawaii. I am also a DEER/RAPIDS administrator and issue I.D. Cards to Military Service members of all branches, DOD Civilians, Retirees, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and their dependents.

The following are comments/issues:

It takes too long to determine disability, to receive treatment and compensation. Many Guard and Reserve soldiers that return from deployment are anxious to go home, often do not disclosed conditions that would normally be treated during their out-processing and delay their return. Later once separated they realize the condition has worsened, and requires treatment, this causes problems with their civilian jobs or prevents them from seeking employment.

Lack of service and specialty care in remote areas, the Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Hilo and Kona provide much needed services but many times they lack the staffing or specialist required. Services members are required to either wait for a specialist to come in or travel to Oahu.

Although the VA has expanded services to families, the veteran centers here lack credentialed/ licensed counselors to provide that service to families, and when available it is only for a limited time. This has been particularly true of both veterans centers here in Hilo, and Kona. I have had several service members and families tell me that they refuse to see the counselor at the HiloVet center, they were very critical of the individual there.

The VA has done a good job in dealing with the traditional problems of active duty veterans, such as physical injuries or PTSD. But they were not prepared for the large influx of Guard and Reserve service members returning from deployments, our citizen soldiers/airmen and family members posed a unique set of problems.

Our active duty counterparts return to a relatively stable military environment verses Guard and Reserve members have to deal with returning to the civilian sector. Returning Guard and Reserve service members have the same stresses as active duty members but they also have the additional stresses of returning to their civilian jobs (some require retraining, qualification, different personnel, and in some cases different positions), and disrupted families.

Families on the outside islands and remote areas became instant military families, upon the mobilization of their Guard/ Reserve members. They lack the military infrastructure (such ACS, etc) of places like Oahu with large military installations. They have to rely on the civilian sector

which was ill prepared to deal with the deployments. Even our schools were unsure of how to deal with children that had a parent or other family member (in some cases multiple family members) deploying.

The VA, Guard and Reserve needs to continue to expand its outreach to our service members and encourage them to utilize the services provided. One of the problems with our Guard and Reserve member is overcoming the stigma or perception of going to the VA, many worry it will affect their civilian jobs and are reluctant come in.

On a final note, I feel that in past several years the VA has greatly improved and expanded its' services to our veterans and their families largely due to the oversight and concern by members of this committee.

Sincerely,

DAVID T. FERREIRA