

**THE
MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART OF
THE U.S.A., INC.**



**THE ONLY CONGRESSIONALLY CHARTERED VETERANS ORGANIZATION
EXCLUSIVELY FOR COMBAT-WOUNDED VETERANS**

**ANNUAL TESTIMONY
FELIX GARCIA III, NATIONAL COMMANDER**

**BEFORE A JOINT HEARING OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE COMMITTEES ON
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

FEBRUARY 26, 2020

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Chairman Moran, Chairman Takano, Ranking members Senator Tester and Representative Roe, members of the committees, and ladies and gentlemen.

As the National Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), it is an honor and privilege to appear before you today, representing members of the Order. I am sure that all of you are aware that the MOPH is unique among Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) in that our membership is comprised entirely of veterans who were wounded in combat on the battlefield in the numerous wars in which this nation has been engaged. For the wounds they suffered they were awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

In a sense, I believe I also sit before you here today on behalf of the almost 2 million servicemen and women, Purple Heart recipients all, who either gave their lives or spilled their blood for our nation and its citizens while defending the freedoms that all Americans are blessed to enjoy.

My oral testimony will be as brief as possible with the understanding that the full written testimony will be entered into the record.

Since it's organizing in 1932, the MOPH has been and continues to be, the original Veterans' Organization for wounded warriors. We continue to serve veterans of all wars, at no cost, by providing tangible benefits to those veterans and their families who require our assistance.

On behalf of the MOPH, I would like to thank the previous Congress for passing legislation that will forever have a positive impact on the lives of our nation's veterans and their families. In particular, I want to thank Ranking Member Roe on the eve of his retirement for his many years of dedication to protecting the rights of America's Veterans, and for holding the Department of Veterans Affairs accountable to the Veterans it serves.

The MOPH thanks the Congress for passage of the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2019, bipartisan legislation that increases the rates of VA disability compensation, dependency compensation for surviving children and spouses, and the clothing allowance for veterans based on rising costs of living.

MOPH also applauds and thanks to Congress for passage of the Commemorative Coin Act for the National Purple Heart Hall of Honor. The PH Hall of Honor is collocated at the New Windsor, New York Cantonment Site where General Washington's army camped during the revolutionary war and where the General first awarded the Badge of Military Merit, predecessor to the Purple

Heart Medal. This coin will assist the Hall of Honor to continue its efforts in commemorating the sacrifices of America's military members who were killed or wounded in combat while serving our great nation.

MOPH is acutely aware of the budget negotiations and the fiscal problems facing our nation but they should have nothing to do with caring for those who have honorably served this nation and now require medical attention or other benefits that they have earned by their honorable military service.

I would also like to state that MOPH supports the recommendations made by the VSOs who devote their time and effort to publish the Independent Budget. MOPH is a proud member of both The Military Coalition (TMC) and the National Military Veterans Alliance (NMVA).

MOPH 2020 PRIORITIES:

VA processing of claims is an issue that your Committees, MOPH and other VSOs have been struggling with for many years. While there has been much progress there remains much to be done. Congress has provided increased funding to help improve the process, which enabled VA to hire more personnel and invest in information technology and other infrastructure.

While there has been progress in the area of claims processing, the veteran who may have been fighting the process for years, especially when appealing benefit denials, does not see that

progress. They just know that they have not been afforded, in a timely manner, the benefits that they earned by their military service.

The Congress needs to continue to hold the VA accountable for its care and service to Veterans in an open and transparent manner while working with the Congress and the VSOs in moving forward with new initiatives.

The MOPH joins with The National Military & Veterans Alliance, a nonpartisan umbrella organization of 35 veteran and military serving organizations, to endorse *The Care for the Veteran Caregiver Act of 2020*. We urge the earliest consideration by your Committees, including legislative hearings, mark-up, and Committee vote. We applaud Representatives Hudson and Rice for their sponsorship of this bill, and urge you and your Committee colleagues to join as cosponsors of this bill.

While the MISSION Act made crucial changes to the Caregiver program (most importantly the expansion of the program to pre-9/11 veterans), time and again our organizations and others have brought to you the continued problems with the Caregiver program. Specifically, the lack of consistent eligibility criteria utilized by the VA in executing the program, the constant fear of the most catastrophically disabled veterans that they will lose their access to the Caregiver program, and the unreasonably short transition time provided Caregivers and families after an eligible veteran passes away. We urge your time and attention to this continuing issue to bring it to fruition in this Congressional year.

MOPH is especially proud to note that during Senator Moran’s first markup as chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, they passed landmark legislation to improve mental health care for veterans. The *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act*, sponsored by Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-Mont.), is a comprehensive and aggressive strategy to reach more veterans with the mental health care they need.

As Ranking Member Tester noted and we agree, “This comprehensive approach—combining supportive services with evidence based clinical care through the Department of Veterans Affairs— will ensure that no veteran slips through the cracks.”

This bill also would hold the VA accountable for its mental health care and suicide prevention efforts by examining how the VA manages its suicide prevention resources and how the VA provides seamless care and information sharing for veterans seeking mental health care from both the VA and community providers. It is a recognition that the invisible wounds of war that have plagued so many veterans for so long must receive equal concern and treatment.

This concludes my testimony and I will be pleased to answer any questions.

Thank you,

Felix Garcia III

MOPH National Commander

Disclosure of Federal Grants and Contracts:

The Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) does not currently receive, nor has MOPH ever received any federal money for grants or contracts other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources at government facilities for outreach and direct veteran assistance services.