

Wounded Warrior Project Addresses Barriers Faced by Veterans Exposed to Toxicants

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14, 2020 /[PRNewswire](#)/ -- Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) recently testified about the needs of veterans who are ill because of exposure to toxicants while in service and the challenges they experience filing for disability compensation with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). WWP Senior National Service Officer Anita Ritchie testified before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs.

"We cannot ignore the obvious correlation between certain toxic exposures and illnesses with no reasonable explanation for onset," Ritchie said. "We have learned from previous generations of veterans how to identify the critical improvements that must be undertaken if we are to prevent history from repeating itself. Without providing access to care and tools to help verify exposures, or establishing presumptions based on the use of existing federally funded research, we may already know what is to come."

The process for obtaining VA disability compensation for illnesses stemming from exposures to toxicants requires providing evidence that an exposure occurred during service and proving a connection between an individual's current diagnosed illness and their service.

Ritchie called on Congress to:

- Set clear guidelines on how VA can use the Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record (ILER) system when processing a VA claim for possible exposure.
- Change the VA policy for developing legal presumptions for toxic exposure-related illnesses and use the rapidly growing body of research on the issue.
- Establish a study on the effects of toxicants, including, but not limited to burn pits.
- Consider the inclusion of Afghanistan service as Gulf War service for the application of the provisions contained in 38 C.F.R. § 3.317.

"Many current era veterans are experiencing the same struggles as prior generations to have their toxic exposure-related illnesses recognized," said Jose Ramos, WWP vice president of government affairs. "Our recommendations can have a major impact on decreasing denials and creating a more equitable process for establishing service connection in toxic exposure disability claims."

Read WWP's full written testimony [here](#).

To learn more about how WWP advocates on toxic exposure legislation, click [here](#).

About Wounded Warrior Project

Since 2003, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) has been meeting the growing needs of warriors, their families, and caregivers – helping them achieve their highest ambition. [Learn more](#).

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