

# NATIONAL VETERANS MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM

HONOR ★ CONNECT ★ INSPIRE ★ EDUCATE

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Dear Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, and Ranking Member, Leader Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee,

My name is Col. (R) Bill Butler, Chief of Staff of the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. I served on active duty in the United States Army for 27 years as an Army Ranger, paratrooper, and career infantryman. I also spent 33 months in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The airborne infantry battalion that I commanded from 2008-2011 and deployed to Afghanistan with is the most highly decorated military unit from the 20+ year Global War on Terror. Paratroopers that I served with were awarded three Medals of Honor, three Distinguished Service Crosses, over a dozen Silver Stars, and dozens of Bronze Stars for Valor: our nation's highest awards for valor. I can tell you that those awards are not awarded because operations went according to plans, they were awarded because we fought a smart, determined enemy whose sole aim was to kill as many Americans as they could. I've seen firsthand the mental health struggles of men and women who have participated in the dirty, brutish endeavors of combat.

I personally know 14 Rangers, paratroopers, Soldiers, and friends who were killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sadly, I know three times as many men who have taken their own lives or died from drug overdoses. I have also seen the power of connections in preventing friends, brothers, and sisters from taking their own lives. I have also seen the ways that non-clinical, healthy activities can connect people on a deeper level, foster friendships after service, and reduce PTSD symptoms and prevent suicide.

I am standing before you in my role as Chief of Staff of the National Veterans Memorial and Museum. The NVMM is the vision of the late Senator John Glenn and opened in October 2018. Prior to opening, Congress designated us as a national museum making us the only national museum and memorial committed to honoring and educating on behalf of all Veterans from all eras and all branches of service. Since our opening our team has grown from a museum engaging our local community through field trips and in-person programming to also serving Veterans with a commitment to addressing the needs of those who have selflessly served our great nation and community, irrespective of where or when they served. This is reflected in our mission to honor and positively impact the lives of Veterans, their families, and our communities through sharing the Veteran experience.

I would like to thank Senator Herschel Craig for being our biggest champion and advocate.

As a 501 c (3) we operate on an annual budget which is met through fundraising and earned revenue. Though the Museum was founded with support from both the Federal and state government, we receive minimal public funding. To this point in our history, we have not received any funding through the State of Ohio budget process.

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I'm here today to discuss ways you can help Veterans and our greater community by investing in the NVMM CARES initiative. The programs that are part of NVMM CARES are effective in reducing PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicide among Veterans. There are dozens of university studies showing the efficacy of our programs. I invite you to read the written submissions from two of our community members directly impacted by our NVMM CARES initiative. Their testimonials speak to our museum's personal impact on them, their families, and their brothers and sisters-in-arms.

We are asking for your consideration to establish the Creating, Advancing, Resilience, Employment and Stability (CARES) Veteran Support Program line item at the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Your investment of \$500,000 each fiscal year would help us continue creating impact through programming. If that level of support is not feasible, any support would be beneficial.

Through our platform as a national institution, and with the leadership and support of Ohio's leading corporations, the Museum is uniquely positioned to address the VA's jarring statistic of 22 Veterans per day who commit suicide. The NVMM CARES program addresses the often-intertwined challenges of mental health and under or unemployment, which can amplify suicide ideation amongst the Veteran community. NVMM CARES allows the Museum to address the Five Social Determinants of Health (Economic Stability, Health Care Access and Quality, Social and Community Context, Education Access and Quality, and Neighborhood and Built Environment), while also building trust between Veterans and our civilian communities by removing barriers preventing Veterans from receiving support services.

The Museum's Resilience and Wellness programming specifically connects Veterans and civilians through activities that are academically proven to reduce the negative side effects of mental health challenges. Currently, we host six weekly classes in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, two weekly yoga classes, and quarterly art classes. These complimentary programs directly impact lives by providing proven supportive activities while also allowing civilians the opportunity to engage and learn from Veterans in an empowering space.

Our Veteran Concierge program addresses the epidemic of Veteran under and unemployment. As of April 2022, over 260,000 Veterans were seeking civilian employment, while those Veterans who are employed are 16% more likely than non-Veterans to be underemployed. As a national Museum, the NVMM has direct access to corporations, Veterans, and transitioning military personnel on a local and national level. This platform has allowed us to connect Veteran job seekers and corporate HR teams with tools designed to streamline and simplify the process of placing qualified Veterans in skilled positions providing a thriving wage and impactful benefits.

Additionally, our team is reducing the costly turnover of Veteran employees by supporting corporate partners in the creation of and growth of Veteran Employee Resource Groups. With 44% of Veterans leaving their first post-military job within one year, and 74% leaving within two years, it is crucial for workplaces to provide retention and support services directed towards Veterans. We know when Veterans are embraced by their employer and connected to other Veterans and allies, they are more likely to stay and grow with an organization.

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We accomplish our work by connecting with Veterans across Ohio and nationwide by maintaining strong connections with our military, Veteran employees of corporate partners, and the forming of strong partnerships with Veteran resources. The Museum is specifically connected with the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, with representation in all states, and the National Association of County Veteran Service Organizations, which supports Veterans in over 500 counties nationwide.

Thank you for your consideration of investment in the NVMM CARES program so that we can continue to provide these services and more, free of charge. I am inviting you to visit the Museum for a tour and more in-depth conversation on the impact of our work to connect Veterans with the needed tools to thrive post-service. I would be happy to take any questions about the Museum and our impact.