

The Honorable Mark Takano, U.S. House of Representatives
House Judiciary Committee
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As Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, one of my top priorities has been the prevention of undue noncitizen veteran deportations. While many would be shocked to learn that veterans who have served our country are being subjected to callous deportations, an unknown number of these individuals have already been removed. On the campaign trail, then-candidate Joseph Biden expressed a willingness to find a solution to prevent veteran deportations – and his Administration has begun taking concrete steps to this end. Now, Congress must take this historic opportunity to both restore honor to these veterans who were forcibly removed by bringing them home and working to prevent future unjust deportations from happening again.

The Department of Defense (DOD) estimates there are roughly 25,000 noncitizens currently serving in our Armed Forces. I was dismayed and alarmed by the findings of a 2019 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report which highlighted the many issues these veterans face once deported, such as difficulty accessing VA benefits and services, inability to attend hearings to appeal VA decisions and overall challenges communicating with the agency. The GAO report makes it perilously clear that reforms are desperately needed across the federal government to prevent these deportations and bring eligible deported veterans home.

Despite being born in a different country, these veterans served the United States for the promise of a better future and for believing in our values as a nation. The reality is that we do not have an accurate sense of how many veterans have been deported due to a lack of documentation and breakdowns of internal processes. Systemic failures across the government have directly contributed to the deportation of noncitizen veterans. It is time that we uphold that promise for these veterans, and we can work toward that goal together by-passing legislation to fix the grave injustice of undue deportations.

Today's hearing will be important to hear from our leaders how this Administration is working toward rectifying this injustice. The Department of Homeland Security, DOD, and the Department of Veterans Affairs all play a role in this space and I am eager to learn what the Administration can do today with its existing authority – and what additional authorities are needed – to address the problem of deported veterans.

Thank you to Chairman Nadler and Representative Lofgren for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. I am looking forward to building on the progress we've made to find a permanent solution that works for our veterans.