

Duckworth Introduces Legislation to Help Deported Veterans Gain Citizenship

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– After a deported U.S. Marine Veteran was denied the opportunity to attend his own naturalization hearing, combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today introduced legislation to help prevent this from happening again. Her legislation would ensure that deported Veterans who have successfully completed the preliminary naturalization process—like U.S. Marine Veteran Roman Sabal who served for six years and received an honorable discharge after attaining the rank of sergeant—can attend their citizenship interview at a port of entry, embassy or consulate without navigating the complex process of advance parole. Sabal, who was denied advance parole last year, missed his prearranged naturalization interview and remains separated from his family in the U.S. The proposal would facilitate access to all of the steps of the naturalization

process for deported Veterans, making sure that they do not get stuck in the process due to the inefficient and complicated advance parole process. Companion legislation will soon be introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative Juan Vargas (D-CA-51).

“Far too many Veterans like Roman—who have been cruelly deported by the same nation they sacrificed to defend—are unable to attend their citizenship interviews because of ambiguous federal policies that keep them from re-entering the country,” Duckworth said. “This legislation would help ensure these Veterans receive a fair chance at gaining citizenship without unnecessary delays that prevent them from reuniting with their families.”

"Congress must remain committed to improving the lives of all of our veterans, regardless of their country of birth," said Vargas. "I am proud to join Rep. Duckworth in making necessary improvements to the law that currently prevents deported veterans from completing the final step in the citizenship process."

Last August, Senator Duckworth wrote to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) demanding Sabal be allowed to re-enter the country to attend his citizenship interview after he was denied advance parole.

The Strengthening Citizenship Services for Veterans Act would help address this issue by:

- Directing the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to conduct biometric collections, naturalization examinations and oath ceremonies at a port of entry, embassy or consulate for Veterans
- Requiring the Secretary of Homeland Security (DHS) to issue guidance for biometric collections, naturalization examinations and oath ceremonies for Veterans
- Directing the Secretaries of Homeland Security and State to jointly report to Congress an analysis of the implementation of this policy, the effectiveness of the guidance issued and update the guidance if any shortcomings are identified

Duckworth re-introduced three bills last year to protect and support Veterans and servicemembers. Her proposals—the Veterans Visa and Protection Act, HOPE Act and I-VETS Act—would prohibit the deportation of Veterans who are not violent offenders, give legal permanent residents a path to citizenship through military service and strengthen VA healthcare services for Veterans. She also introduced legislation last

November to protect military families from deportation and traveled to Tijuana, Mexico, on Veterans Day to meet with a group of Veterans who have been deported to hear about their efforts to access the VA healthcare benefits they've earned.

This legislation has been endorsed by Veterans for American Ideals and the Services Employees International Union.

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