



**WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**HEARING
ON
PENDING LEGISLATION**

NOVEMBER 17, 2021

Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs – thank you for allowing Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) to submit this written statement for the record of today's hearing on pending legislation. We are grateful for the opportunity to highlight WWP's positions on key issues and legislation before the Committee.

Wounded Warrior Project was founded to connect, serve, and empower our nation's wounded, ill, and injured veterans, Service members, and their families and caregivers. We are fulfilling this mission by providing more than 20 life-changing programs and services to over 200,000 registered post-9/11 warriors and family members, continually engaging with those we serve, and capturing an informed assessment of the challenges this community faces. We are pleased to share that perspective for this hearing on pending legislation and are hopeful that it will inform your actions to improve the lives of veterans and their families during the remainder of the 117th Congress.

Although WWP has been pleased to work with the Committee on multiple pieces of legislation over the past several months, today's hearing offers the rare opportunity to recognize the contributions and personal advocacy of WWP Alumni Brian Neuman and Mark O'Brien. These warriors are the inspiration for legislation before the Committee today (S. 2513) – and its House companion (H.R. 4772) – and we are honored to share their courageous stories.

At the age of 21, Marine Corporal Mark O'Brien was serving his second tour of duty in Iraq. On day number 68, Mark was hit by a rocket propelled grenade that ripped through the armor of his Humvee. Though he made it out alive, he lost both his right arm and leg in the explosion.

DUTY ★ HONOR ★ COURAGE ★ COMMITMENT ★ INTEGRITY ★ COUNTRY ★ SERVICE



In 2004, Staff Sgt. Brian Neuman was serving in Iraq when his vehicle was hit by an Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP). The projectile penetrated the vehicle and ripped across Brian's chest, severely injuring his left arm. Recounting the incident, Brian shares, "I got out of the [vehicle] with my left arm in my right hand."

Mark and Brian's stories are just two examples of the perils of warfighting in the post-9/11 era. Improvements in combat casualty care, including better use of tourniquets, quicker blood transfusions, and faster prehospital transport times, have saved the lives of many who would have been lost in previous wars, including those most critically injured, who experienced a three-fold increase in survival rates from 2001 to 2017.¹ Many of those who survived due to these advances in medical technology and battlefield care were very seriously wounded and will be challenged by lifelong physical disabilities or mental health conditions.

One of the challenges faced by veterans whose injuries require the use of prosthetics, orthopedic appliances, and wheelchairs is that these devices often cause significant wear and tear to their clothing. This is also true of veterans who require medications and ointments for skin conditions such as severe burns. The need to frequently replace clothing that would have otherwise remained serviceable can create a significant financial burden for these veterans. For this reason, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) provides an annual clothing allowance for eligible veterans to reimburse them for any clothing that may be damaged or require alterations throughout the year.

While many veterans who avail themselves of this benefit have injuries that will not change, they are currently required to re-apply for the clothing allowance benefit each year. The *Brian Neuman VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act* and the *Mark O'Brien VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act* will automatically re-enroll qualifying veterans, eliminating the need to file a form every year and removing a step that is not only burdensome but also insensitive to the fact that the benefit is generally reserved for those with permanent life-long injuries. Reducing paperwork will also create more time for VA providers to focus on what they do best – building and supplying better prosthetics to veterans.

Many returning Service members like Mark and Brian also face psychological wounds in addition to their physical injuries. Whether it be post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, or the emotional toll of transitioning back to civilian life, mental health challenges add to and exacerbate the frustrations of living with physical scars— as wounded veterans grieve the simpler daily life they can no longer have.

Yet, in spite of all these hurdles, veterans like Mark and Brian have not only found the courage to live fulfilling lives but also found the heart to help others do the same. Today, 17 years after what could have been a fatal accident, Mark has worked as a dispatcher for the Erie County Sheriff's Office, has shared motivational speeches, and is married with two kids. Likewise, Brian is the Alumni Deputy Director for WWP, where he helps other wounded veterans build meaningful lives as they transition back to the civilian world.

¹ Howard JT, Kotwal RS, Stern CA, et al. *Use of Combat Casualty Care Data to Assess the US Military Trauma System During the Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts, 2001-2017*. Surgery. Published online 2019, available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamasurgery/article-abstract/2729451>.

In honor of veterans like Mark and Brian, WWP is proud to support *Brian Neuman VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act* and the *Mark O'Brien VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act*, which would automatically re-enroll qualifying veterans like them in the clothing reimbursement program. In a world where everyday tasks can be burdensome for wounded veterans, this legislation gives our nation the chance to pay them back for their service by making their lives easier. WWP encourages lawmakers to stand by this legislation; because in this country, the American spirit is most alive when we recognize, appreciate, and reward the quiet courage of Americans like Mark and Brian — courage that far too often goes without notice.