



February 12, 2013

**Testimony in Support of HOUSE BILL 1282
Relating to Military Service
Before the
House Committee On Veterans, Military, & International Affairs,
& Culture and the Arts
Hearing On Wednesday, February 13, 2013, 8:30 A.M.
In Conference Room 312**

Chair Takai, Vice Chair Ito and Committee Members,

The Department of Hawaii, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) represents 3,800 members in 20 Posts located throughout the State of Hawaii. VFW is a federally chartered national association of soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen who have served the United States of America in wars, campaigns, and expeditions on foreign soil or in hostile waters.

H.B. 1282 expands the scope of eligibility requirements for the Hawaii Medal of Honor to include service members, including members of the Hawaii national guard, United States military reserves, and regular United States armed forces, who commit suicide on the battlefield or when deployed.

The Hawaii Medal of Honor has been awarded most recently only to families of those Hawaii service members, who were killed in Afghanistan from hostile action or from non-hostile action other than suicide. This bill would provide recognition by our State of Hawaii to families of those Hawaii service members whose self-inflicted deaths in Afghanistan have resulted from unbearable mental and emotional stresses they encountered in combat. All families experience the same anguish and pain regardless of how their service members died in Afghanistan.

VFW Hawaii members are grateful for your efforts to include, rather than continue to exclude, Hawaii service members who committed suicide on the battlefield or when deployed. We urge this Committee to pass this long-overdue amendment to H.R.S. § 5-22.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 1282.

Lawrence M.G. Enomoto

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VFW Hawaii State Legislative Liaison

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR UNIFORMED SERVICES

Hawaii Chapter (HI-1)

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February 10, 2013

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1282, RELATING TO MILITARY SERVICE

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY, AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

**HEARING , AT 8:30AM, ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13TH, 2013, IN
CONFERENCE ROOM 312**

Aloha Chair Takai and Vice Chair Ito: Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1282. The National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS) is honored to be recognized as "The Service Member's Voice in Government." Here, in the great State of Hawaii, NAUS Hawaii Chapter (HI-1) serves at the pleasure of our nation's largest per-capita uniformed service community.

NAUS Hawaii Chapter (HI-1) is grateful your noble efforts to expand the scope of eligibility requirements for the Hawaii Medal of Honor to include service members, including members of the Hawaii national guard, United States military reserves, and regular United States armed forces, who commit suicide on the battlefield or when deployed.

President Barack Obama pledged to do more work to prevent military suicides, saying that he was "committed to removing the stigma associated with the unseen wounds of war." One of President Obama's initiatives was to reverse a long-standing policy of not sending condolence letters to the families of service members who commit suicide while deployed to a combat zone. Mental health and troop advocacy groups lauded President Obama's decision.

Amending Section 22-1 Hawaii Revised Statutes, to provide this recognition in State Law, echoes our Commander in Chief's sentiments, and is sincerely appreciated by the deceased warrior's surviving family members and loved-ones.

NAUS Hawaii Chapter (HI-1) encourages your committee to consider passing HB 1282 as written.

D Egge

Dennis Egge; Chapter President

9 February 2013

Testimony:

Opposition to HB 1282 Expanding Hawaii Medal of Honor to victims of suicide.

As a former military officer and Gold Star father I vehemently oppose expanding the award of the Hawaii Medal of Honor to those who commit suicide while on deployment to a theater of operations.

Suicide is serious problem in our military that needs to be addressed through prevention and treatment but not rewarded. My heart goes out to the families of suicide victims. However, to commit the act of suicide especially during a deployment or in the heat of combat puts the entire unit at risk not to mention morale. Bottom line it is not an honorable way to die. Suicide can be compared to cowardice similar to running from the enemy or a self inflicted wound to avoid combat. I would be less opposed to a bill that expanded the Hawaii Medal of Honor to those that committed the act of suicide after their deployment and were diagnosed with PTSD but even this would be a stretch of the word honor. If there is a movement to award to those who have committed suicide I suggest introduction of a bill that creates a separate award or letter. The Hawaii Medal of Honor should go to those who died honorably serving their country in combat or under very special circumstances-but not suicide.

President is now sending letters of condolence to the families of those who committed suicide. This does not mean we should be giving those who committed suicide posthumous medals. Doing so encourages the terrible and unacceptable act of suicide. Suicide goes against every ethos of good order and discipline so critical to a strong military force.

I am sorry but having experienced a son who died giving his life to save others in the heat of combat I cannot support HB 1282 and will vigorously fight against having it passed.

Very Respectfully,

Dave Brostrom

Father of 1LT Jonathan Brostrom

KIA Wanat Afghanistan 13 July 2008

Public Testimony
of
Allen K. Hoe
Honolulu, Hawaii

In Opposition of HB 1282

Before the House:
Committee on Veterans, Military & International Affairs & Culture and the Arts
Wednesday, February 13, 2013
8:30 a.m., Conference Rm. 312

Aloha Chair Takai, Vice-Chair Ito and Members.

My name is Allen K. Hoe; I am a combat veteran of some of the most brutal battles fought in the Vietnam War during TET of 1968. For me, death and dying on the battlefield has been up close and personal. I am also a GOLD STAR FATHER. On January 22, 2005 that status was thrust upon my family with the news that our beloved Nainoa was killed in combat in Mosul, Iraq while serving his country. Our family was honored by the action of the Legislature later that year to consider and create the Hawaii Medal of Honor in appreciation and gratitude of military members who gave their life in defense of our nation and its freedoms.

Duty-Honor-Country is the mantra which every American Soldier lives by. It is the code which is instilled within you 24/7 during your training and its ultimate purpose is to give you the fortitude when you must face the difficult challenges on the battlefield.

Where is the "Duty" in the measure before you? Where is the "Country" in the measure before you? Most importantly where is the "Honor" in the measure before you.

Suicide: the act of intentionally causing one's own death, often committed out of despair, the cause of which is frequently attributed to a mental disorder such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, alcoholism, or drug abuse.

It is the singularly most cowardly act of permanence to a temporary problem. It is the ultimate act of dereliction of "Duty" it is an affront to the cultural values of our Country and it flies in the face of "Honor."

It is undisputed that Suicide is a major problem within our armed services which needs to be addressed. However, to promote the position that it should be rewarded is absurd.

If the Legislature is serious about contributing to the issue of Suicide in the military, then do so in a way which is pro active not re active in terms of beneficial services to our warriors and their families who face this personal crisis.

Respectfully,
Allen K. Hoe

My name is Brandy Williams and I am the widow, of Sgt. Eugene Williams who was killed on March 29, 2003 in Najaf, Iraq. My husband and three other soldiers were killed while manning a roadside check point. A taxi cab pulled up, waived for help, then detonated a bomb killing my husband, Cpl. Michael Curtin, PFC Diego Rincon and PFC Michael Creighton.

In 2006, my family and I attended the first Hawaii Medal of Honor Ceremony. I vividly remember walking up to receive the Medal with my 6 year old daughter, Mya holding my hand. I was honored to receive this medal on behalf of my husband's service to his country. As we sat at home on September 11, 2001 and watched the World Trade Center towers collapse in his beloved home town, Eugene knew that one day he would need to fight for our freedoms so that his children would be able to live their lives without this worry.

The Hawaii Medal of Honor hangs below a framed picture alongside his Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medals. It is a daily reminder of his sacrifice and also a reminder of the love and aloha that Hawaii has showed to our family. It is a reminder that Hawaii will never forget my husband and all those who continue to fight for our country.

I am asking you to support HB 1282 so that all families including deaths by suicide be included in receiving the Hawaii Medal of Honor. These service members although not killed in combat suffer from the effects of the war and what they have endured. They should not be forgotten.

Sincerely,

Brandy Williams

Proud Wife of Sgt. Eugene Williams

KIA 3/29/2003 OIF