



July 30, 2025

Good afternoon Ranking Member Padilla, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Janessa Goldbeck. I served for seven years in the United States Marine Corps as a combat engineer officer, leading missions focused on mobility, survivability, and critical infrastructure. Like many junior officers, I held additional billets. One of the most meaningful was serving as my unit's Voting Assistance Officer.

That role came with a clear mission: to ensure every Marine could vote - no matter where they were stationed or how remote. That meant navigating important deadlines, often with limited connectivity and unpredictable mail. It was my job to make sure everyone had a fair shot at participating in the democracy we were defending.

Today, I lead Vet Voice Foundation, a national, nonpartisan organization founded in 2009 to elevate the voices of veterans and military families on the issues that impact us. We empower veterans to serve again - through civic engagement, organizing, and holding decision-makers accountable.

We back that mission with action. Vet Voice Foundation runs one of the largest voter outreach programs for military-connected Americans in the country. We reach hundreds of thousands of veterans, service members, and military families through direct communication, digital campaigns, rural radio, and peer-to-peer outreach.

We do this work because voting as a veteran or military-connected American is harder than it should be.

Over 30% of veterans have a service-connected disability. For many vets, especially those with mobility limitations, chronic injuries, or PTSD, in-person voting isn't feasible. Absentee voting is essential - but it is increasingly under threat. As states tighten ballot receipt deadlines and restrict assistance services, disabled veterans are disproportionately affected.

Active-duty military voters face other obstacles. About three-quarters are eligible to vote absentee because they're stationed away from home. Yet only 49% voted in the 2020 presidential election, compared to 67% of the general population. In 2022, the number dropped to just 26%, while nearly half of civilians voted. These aren't abstract numbers - they reflect a system that fails to account for the realities of military life: unreliable mail access, limited internet, frequent moves, and long deployments.



I've lived it. In 2012, I was a Marine Corps officer candidate at Quantico during the general election. I couldn't leave base. I had no phone or internet. My only option was to vote absentee and hope my ballot made it in time. I had no way to track it. That uncertainty stays with you.

That's why Vet Voice Foundation does more than outreach. We're in court right now fighting to ensure absentee ballots from military voters and veterans are counted as long as they're postmarked by Election Day.

In Mississippi, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and California, we've defended state laws allowing a short grace period - usually just a few days - for ballots to be received and counted. These laws help all voters and don't advantage any party. They also reflect the realities of military life.

But those laws are under coordinated attack.

In 2025 alone, 17 states considered bills to eliminate or shorten the grace period for mail ballots. North Dakota, Kansas, and Utah passed laws requiring ballots to arrive by Election Day - even if mailed on time. These changes hit military voters hardest.

In North Carolina, lawmakers repealed a three-day grace period. The result: over 2,300 ballots were rejected in 2024 that would have counted a year earlier. Some likely came from military families still recovering from a hurricane that disrupted mail service statewide. In Pennsylvania, nearly 7,000 ballots were tossed for arriving just hours too late - even though they were mailed by election day in good faith.

Recent federal actions are making things worse. A March 2025 executive order requires all federal voter registration applicants to submit documentary proof of citizenship - like a passport or birth certificate. Military IDs, long accepted by election officials, now may not always be sufficient. The order also effectively mandates that all ballots, including UOCAVA ballots, arrive by Election Day - effectively nullifying grace periods in dozens of states and increasing the risk of disenfranchisement for overseas military voters.

The SAVE Act would go even further. It requires all voters - including deployed troops and their families - to register in person with documentary proof of citizenship and eliminates mail and online registration. For service members on remote bases or in combat zones, at sea on a ship or in a submarine, in-person registration is simply not feasible. Civilian family members who vote under UOCAVA would face the same barriers, despite having no control over their overseas location. These changes don't just complicate voting - they make it nearly impossible for many military-connected Americans.

Of course, this isn't just misguided policy - it's a coordinated legal assault.



Conservative legal groups, political operatives, and national party lawyers are suing to overturn grace periods and block protections for UOCAVA voters. Some are even challenging the lawfulness of counting UOCAVA ballots received after Election Day, despite decades of federal precedent.

President Trump has publicly attacked these ballots and pushed conspiracy theories about them. He has claimed that UOCAVA is used to “cheat” and his allies have disparaged it as a voting “loophole.” That rhetoric has consequences, and military and veteran voters are caught in the crossfire.

Vet Voice Foundation stands firmly against these efforts. If a service member, veteran, or military family member follows the rules and votes on time, their vote should count. Period.

We are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for a fair shot at exercising our fundamental right to cast a ballot and have our voices heard.

This committee has both the opportunity and the responsibility to act. That means preserving postmark-based receipt deadlines, expanding military voter outreach, and rejecting cynical efforts to disenfranchise those who risk everything for this country.

Thank you for your time and attention. I welcome your questions.