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STATEMENT OF
THE AMERICAN MILITARY RETIREES ASSOCIATION (AMRA)

Joint Senate and House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Hearing on the Legislative Presentation of Multiple VSO's

March 16, 2016

Presented by
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National Legislative Director

On behalf of the American Military Retirees Association (AMRA), a Veteran Service Organization whose members include all categories of military retirees and their surviving spouses, I am grateful to the Committees for this opportunity to express the views of our collective membership regarding providing veteran status for certain National Guard and Reserve forces retirees.

Veteran Status for Certain National Guard and Reserve Forces Retirees

Under current law, Reserve and National Guard service members who are eligible for retirement but who have not served on Active Duty under Title 10 orders for other than training purposes are not designated as veterans. In order to receive the distinction of being considered a veteran, a Reserve component service member must serve on active duty for two years or for the designated length of an activation period under Title 10 orders for other than training purposes. In accordance with current law, a Reserve component service member who has not met this requirement can serve honorably for twenty or more years, earning the right to retire, yet not be considered a veteran.

Approximately 200,000 members of the Reserves/National Guard have served for twenty or more years yet were never activated under Title 10 for other than training purposes. These service men and women stood ready to perform any duty required of them yet, due to the needs of their units or the branches they served in, were never mobilized to serve on active duty. However, they did serve honorably and met the requirements to retire from the military.

After twenty or more years of service reservists and guardsmen are qualified to retire and are eligible to receive military health care, shop on base, receive some VA benefits including VA guaranteed home loans, and at age sixty they are entitled to receive retirement pay. However, under current law, they are not considered to be veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States.

The American Military Retirees Association has been fully supportive of both House and Senate efforts to rectify this problem and we have advocated for the passage of both H.R. 1384 and S. 743. We have supported these bills because they would allow retired members of our Guard/Reserve forces to have the earned honor and distinction of calling themselves veterans and because their new veteran status would be codified in Title 38 law. This last point is vitally important with regard to restoring the honor of retirees who believe that they have been restricted from a status that they have earned over the course of twenty or more years of faithful service to the United States of America.

Over the course of the last year H.R. 1384 was passed in the House of Representatives. However, S. 743 has not passed in the Senate and it was blocked from being included as an amendment in the FY 2016 NDAA when one Senator dissented during a unanimous consent vote for its inclusion.

More recently, S. 1203, Section 701 has passed in the Senate. We are very grateful to the Senate for passing virtually the same language that was included in the House and Senate bills discussed above. However, while we believe that this provision is a very important step in the right direction we also believe that it misses the mark with regard to honoring those who have faithfully served for twenty or more years.

By not codifying veteran status in Title 38 law we believe that a mixed message is being sent to these retirees. On the one hand we are telling them that, yes, you can now consider yourself a veteran but, on the other hand, we're telling them that they are not quite the same as the rest of the veteran community. In a nation that prides itself on equality and fairness for all, it seems unbecoming to discriminate against this population of U.S. military retirees.

The American Military Retirees Association realizes that there are ongoing efforts by other VSO's with regard to this issue and we salute and support these efforts. We have been and will continue to be supportive of H.R.

1384, S. 743, and, to a slightly lesser degree, S. 1203, Section 701. However, we will gladly support other legislative efforts that may be introduced by lawmakers or that are currently being proposed by other VSO's.

In the end, our primary desire is to have veteran status conferred upon any past, current, or future Guard/Reserve retiree who has served honorably for twenty or more years but, who through no fault of their own, have not served on Active Duty under Title 10 orders for other than training purposes and that this status is appropriately recognized by being codified into law.

The American Military Retirees Association appreciates the attention that the Committees are giving to this issue and we thank you for holding this hearing and for considering our testimony.