

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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Tanya J. Bradsher  
Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Ashish S. Vazirani  
Acting Under Secretary of Defense for  
Personnel and Readiness  
4000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Deputy Secretary Bradsher and Under Secretary Vazirani,

We write to request modification to the DD-2648, the “Service Member Pre-Separation / Transition Counseling and Career Readiness Standards eForm for Service Members Separating, Retiring, Released from Active Duty (REFRAD),” to ensure a warm hand-off for transitioning servicemembers to the state veterans’ agencies in the states those servicemembers are considering moving to post-separation.

Unfortunately, only a fraction of servicemembers who fill out the DD-2648 Opt-in to send their information to state veterans’ agencies. This is a lost opportunity to connect transitioning servicemembers with dedicated professionals (usually fellow veterans) at state veterans’ agencies who can assist individuals with questions and issues which come up pre-separation and post-separation. Modifying the current yes or no question to simply opt-out would reverse the inadvertent assumption transitioning servicemembers do not want to participate.

The help provided by state veterans’ agencies includes:

- Connecting transitioning servicemembers with trusted, relevant, community-based organizations to find job and housing;
- Ensuring servicemembers are aware of all of their earned benefits in their state, and;
- Helping veterans make appointments and file claims with the VA through accredited veteran service officers.

This small yet meaningful change could make a real difference, but it’s also important to remember agencies cannot share a transitioning servicemember’s information with outside organizations without consent from the individual as dictated by law. This small yet life-saving change will make a difference in the lives of transitioning servicemembers.

Every year, approximately 200,000 servicemembers transition out of the military. Studies consistently demonstrate the first few years, post-military separation, carries the highest risk of suicide for veterans. During this already difficult time period, veterans are also faced with the challenge of obtaining accessible mental health coverage and services as they move from Department of Defense (DoD) care and into the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Warm hand-offs can directly help to decrease this risk by ensuring they have real people they can contact and rely on for timely assistance. Amending the DD-2648 would help.

The National Association of State Bureaus of Veterans Services fully supports this modification to the DD-2648. Furthermore, multiple witnesses in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee testified about the need for improved warm hand-offs when transitioning into civilian life. Taking this action could reduce the risk of suicide and help facilitate an individual's sense of community in civilian life. The Armed Services do a fantastic job training Marines, Sailors, Sentinels, Soldiers, Airman, and Guardians. We must take the same focused approach as they return to the civilian world.

With this in mind, we look forward to your response to the following questions:

- Does DoD have the authority to change the current “yes” or “no” question on the DD-2648 to Opt-out on its own?
- If yes, will you make this simple, yet critical change and what is your timeline for doing so?
- Since the Coast Guard also utilizes the DD-2648, would a change to the Opt-out question also apply to separating Coast Guard personnel?

It is imperative we improve servicemembers' transition into civilian We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



ANGUS S. KING, JR.  
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer  
United States Senator