

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 28, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

Thank you for your service to our nation and commitment to U.S. servicemembers and their families. We write regarding the Department of Defense (DOD) valor awards website, which recognizes our nation's warfighters awarded the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, and Silver Star for acts of valor. It is with these efforts in mind that we respectfully request you list Purple Heart (PH) recipients, particularly PH recipients who received the award on or after September 11, 2001, on the valor awards website.

On August 7, 1782, General George Washington established the "Badge of Military Merit," the figure of a heart in purple cloth or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding over the left breast, for meritorious action. This precursor to the PH ceased use after the end of the American Revolution. On February 22, 1932, the PH medal was established by the War Department for wounds received in action and meritorious duty. It was later updated to include servicemembers who suffered combat wounds or death. According to the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH), a congressionally chartered organization, there are approximately 350,000 living PH recipients ranging from World War II veterans to veterans of the recent wars in the Middle East.

On March 4, 2001, Ernie Rivera, National Commander of the MOPH, testified at a joint hearing of the Senate and House Committees on Veteran's Affairs, where he proposed the creation of a database for PH recipients. The National Flag Foundation, a nonprofit located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, currently spearheads this effort, which is supported by numerous veteran service organizations including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Silver Star Families of America, American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Marine Corps League, Gold Star Wives of America, Disabled American Veterans, Blue Star Mothers of America, AMVETS, and American Gold Star Mothers.

As you know, DOD's valor awards website was created during the Obama Administration to honor servicemembers awarded a distinguished military medal and to reduce the number of incidents of those fraudulently claiming to have received certain awards of valor. Unfortunately, fraud is still occurring by individuals claiming to be recipients of the PH. In addition, in the absence of a PH database, veteran service organizations struggle to identify individuals most in need of their resources. Many organizations supporting this effort do so with the intention of improving services for PH recipients.

In 2022, our country will celebrate the 240th anniversary of then-General George Washington awarding the first precursor of the PH and the 90th anniversary of General Douglas MacArthur re-

establishing the PH. In celebrating this upcoming milestone, we request that DOD honor current PH recipients and commit to recognizing the sacrifices of future servicemembers by listing this honor on the valor awards website.

Thank you for your consideration of our request and for your continued service to our men and women in uniform. We look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



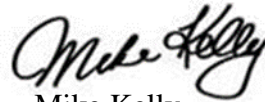
Guy Reschenthaler
Member of Congress



Mike Doyle
Member of Congress



Conor Lamb
Member of Congress



Mike Kelly
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