

Statement of **Lourdes Santos Tancinco, Esq** President, San Francisco Veterans Equity Center
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On The Filipino Veterans Issue: Health Care and Recognition Before the Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health June 13, 2002 Washington, D.C.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: My name is Lourdes Santos Tancinco. I represent the San Francisco Veterans Equity Center and the National Network on Veterans Equity. The San Francisco Veterans Equity Center is the only nationwide service agency catering exclusively to the needs of the Filipino World War II veterans. It was established in the City of San Francisco through the collaboration of community members and advocates concerned with the plight of the Filipino veterans. As of today, we have personally served over 1,000 veterans. The National Network for Veterans Equity is a loose coalition of different organizations including various Asian Pacific American organizations advocating justice and equity for our Filipino veterans and supporting H.R. 491.

I am also an attorney practicing immigration law in San Francisco CA. Since 1993, I have provided pro bono legal services to countless veterans in my individual capacity, and in my capacity as supervising attorney for the free legal clinic of the Veterans Equity Center.

I. INTRODUCTION: Status of the Filipino World War II Veterans Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, we stand for Filipinos veterans who fought under the US Armed Forces during World War II, but were deprived their US veterans status under the Rescission Act of 1946. Though thousands of Filipino soldiers have been naturalized as US citizens after half a century of struggle to fight for their right to US citizenship, a host of other urgent issues remain to be addressed. Your honors, I have seen the unfortunate plight of our Filipino veterans living in the United States relating to their health problems and their struggle for recognition.

II. HEALTH CARE ISSUE It was only a decade ago that majority of the Filipino veterans arrived in numbers in various part of the country as naturalized citizens. Several thousand Filipino veterans remain in the Philippines unable to naturalize due to failing health and lack of resources. Approximately, 3,000 Filipino veterans live in San Francisco and other cities in the bay area. Those who have had the courage, determination, and resources to make it here despite the odds chose to spend the rest of their lives here because they are living their dream of US citizenship.

Unfortunately, citizenship came to them only in 1990, these Veterans who have recently immigrated are now in their late 70s and 80s. They now suffer from ailments common among senior citizens, such as, pneumonia, high blood pressure, heart ailments, diabetes and cancer. In the San Francisco bay area, veterans who have health problems seek badly needed medical treatment, not under the Veterans Administration system, but under Medicare and the California Department of Social Services welfare program. In California, where thousands of veterans live, majority of these veterans rely on SSI payments. Only a handful of veterans who have service connected disability, fall under the Veterans Administration health care system. Even veterans with service connected disabilities are denied eligibility by the Veterans Administration due simply to failure on their part to present evidence to prove their service connected disabilities.. Those Veterans with service connected disabilities are also denied access to Veterans Administration for their non service connected ailments. Due to the lack of assistance and proper health care, many of our veterans are dying alone in their hospital beds, in their hotel rooms, and even accidentally on the streets. In the year 2000, hundreds of Filipino soldiers took advantage of the law that allow them to take their SSI welfare check to the Philippines. However,

whatever advantage there is in terms of the US\$ - PHP exchange rate is offset by the difficulty of obtaining health care in the Philippines. For this reason, many of them have since returned to the United States. It is a tragic, if not cruel irony to see our Veterans after more than half - century finally able to reach the US, only to fall into further neglect, despair and hopelessness. Allow me to share with you a few of these stories: Mr. Dela Cruz Mr.Dela Cruz is a member of a recognized guerilla forces who saved several American soldiers during the war. I