



February 22, 2019

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs
412 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inhofe, Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Reed, and Ranking Member Tester,

The Military Women's Coalition, a coalition of 18 organizations that serve and support service women and women veterans, requests your support in making permanent a pilot transition assistance program for service women. The service women's transition program is an initiative born of a partnership between the United States Air Force Women's Initiative Team and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Women's Health Services. The Women's Health Transition Training Pilot is dedicated to providing health education to transitioning service women. The course highlights barriers to VA care, and awareness of women's health services, preparedness for navigating VA enrollment/benefits, and perceptions of VA as a viable provider of women's healthcare. Women-specific healthcare information is currently not addressed in the mandatory transition assistance program.

Our organizations are committed to ensuring all service women have access to women specific health information, tools, and the support they need to reach their personal and professional goals during and after service. With this guiding principle, we would be remiss not to ask for your full support for the continuation of the Women's Health Transition Training Pilot to a permanent program. We are requesting support to permanently integrate the program into the transition assistance program curriculum, specifically in the Transition – Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) tracks and make it permanent across the Services.

Research shows service women have different healthcare needs compared to men. Disparate health outcomes—particularly around suicide, musculoskeletal health, mental health, sexual trauma, and homelessness—affect women after they leave service at a disproportionately high rate. Between 2001 and 2015, the rate of suicide among women Veterans increased 62.4% compared to 29.7% for men. The rate of suicide among Veterans who have *not* used VA services increased faster than those who did. This transition course strives to prepare service women for their health transition by discussing unique challenges they experience. This course takes a tailored approach to personalized and experiential education, designed by and for service women.

Evaluation of the Women's Health Transition Training Pilot has unveiled key themes around VA enrollment and utilization barriers. On a large scale, transitioning service women:

- Often do not view themselves as “Veterans”, leading them to not take advantage of earned benefits



- Do not understand how to best prepare for their transition to the civilian sector regarding healthcare
- Lack knowledge of enrollment processes and VA eligibility, services, and resources
- Do not always believe VA is a place to receive quality women-specific care

We believe the Women's Health Transition Training Pilot addresses these barriers and will profoundly impact the lives of service women through and beyond their transition. We earnestly ask for your support to continue and expand the program to all Services and in collecting data on this program. ***This program creates a safe space for women to discuss gender- and military-specific challenges unlike any other.*** It is critical for service women to receive information about their future healthcare, challenge their beliefs about the VA health system, and build a community, all of which is vital to their success, health, and well-being, after serving.

For more information on this program please visit the following media articles:

<https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1595519/air-force-partners-with-va-implements-womens-health-transition-pilot-program/>

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/08/08/air-force-wants-to-connect-female-airmen-with-va-resources/>

<https://www.macdill.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1599411/macdill-launches-program-assists-military-women-in-transition-to-civilian-life/>

https://www.tampa.va.gov/features/AF_TAP_Pilot.asp

<http://www.gcvf.org/information-focus-groups-can-change-way-va-delivers-health-care-women-veterans/>

Sincerely,

*Service Women's Action Network
Women in Military Service For America
Protect Our Defenders
GA Military Women
Service: Women Who Serve
Pink Berets
Red Feather Ranch
WINC: For All Women Veterans
Northeast Florida Women Veterans
Combat Female Veterans Families United
Veteran Women Enterprise Center
Lady Veterans Connect
Melwood Veteran Services
Lambda Beta Alpha Military Sorority
San Diego Women Veterans Network
Women Veterans of West Texas
Women Veterans Alliance
Humble Warrior*