

As Program Manager of A Veteran Peer Support program, I have seen the excitement that women veterans express when they realize there are others out there! In the passage of this bill there will be a mechanism in place to reach more women who have been trying to navigate life after their military service and which do not believe they ARE deserving of the benefits they deserve! Thank you for creating this bill Representative Piluso and giving us hope for better representation with the Veterans Administration and our communities!

Patti Jay

My name is Sarina Criswell. I served as an active duty Sergeant in the Marine Corps for eleven and a half years from March 2001 to September 2012. Although I did not deploy but I stood many funeral details from 2005 to 2008. Through half of my career I was a single mother with zero family support and little to no command support. Myself, like many other females in the military silently suffer and could use an advocate to confide in and to assist with resources to assist with therapy through social interaction and support groups. Some of us are looked down upon by some male counter parts. Some have been sexually abused and mistreated. It is important for female Veterans to have an advocate to go to and have that support from our female Veterans counter parts. Veterans understand veterans. Some Veterans do not know where to go for assistance and the VA system is confusing and discouraging for some. With women like Patti to assist Veterans receive the assistance they need to adjust to the civilian sector or resources for therapy and jobs, we as Veterans can achieve so much for each other. Veterans helping Veterans. Even though we are no longer serving we can still serve to assist each other. Always.

Sarina Criswell  
SGT USMC

Chair Lively and members of the committee, my name is **Amber Stevens**. I served in the Army from 1999-2002 as a bridge builder. Though I have always been a proud soldier, it took me about 5 years to identify myself as a veteran, even though I had accessed the GI bill benefits I was entitled to. It took even longer for me to realize that I could access health care; there certainly were times when I did not have insurance. I attended a Hiring Our Heroes job fair, which led to my employment with The American Legion Department of Oregon. The past 26 months has been a wonderful opportunity to assist other veterans. If I did not have this job, I do not believe I would have ever spoken to a service officer, or to someone I felt I could trust. Navigating the bureaucracy and different challenges related to gender via The Department of Veterans Affairs claims, appeals, health care, and other benefits often times feels daunting for all veterans; especially female veterans. I have experienced these issues first hand, and witnessed others in their times of need. Creating an advocacy position of Oregon Women Veterans Coordinator would be a tremendous help to reach out, identify female veterans and assist them and their families to access benefits that were earned, are available, and can make a big impact not only in their individual lives; but on the economy as well. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

