

Kate Brown
Governor



Oregon Commission for Women
"Advocating Equality and Diversity"
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**Testimony in support of SB 81
June 1, 2017, Hearing Room E, 3:00pm
House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness**

Chair Evans, Vice Chair Boone, Vice Chair Esquivel, and Representatives Lewis, Lively, Meek, Parrish, and Post:

The Oregon Commission for Women (OCFW), in its role as advocate for the women of Oregon, strongly supports SB81 which will establish experts within Veterans Affairs offices statewide who can help veterans, including women veterans, navigate the complexities of veterans' services at local, state and federal levels to find and access the care they need.

It was a surprise to the OCFW, when reviewing the 2016 Women Veterans Health Care Study at one of our regular meetings, how low the rates of access to service are for women veterans. It provides a comprehensive look and review of mental and physical health care for Oregon women veterans and reveals that while Oregon women are serving at ever increasing numbers they are:

- Less likely to identify as veterans,
- Just as likely to have PTSD as male veterans, but are under-diagnosed or misdiagnosed in the VA system and less likely to receive PTSD benefits or treatment,
- Less likely to be diagnosed with substance abuse disorders and obtain treatment,
- More likely to be homeless,
- Less likely to have social support – an important factor in treatment success, and are
- More likely to feel unwelcome and unsafe at VA hospitals and clinics.

Within the Oregon report, there are 12 essential recommendations for critical changes to improve delivery, accessibility, and use of health care services for women: #5 being the need for dedicated expertise that can welcome and help women veterans navigate and access proper evaluation and care. The proposed navigator in SB 81 will serve in this capacity for all vets.

Oregon is justly proud of its women vets who comprised 12% of service members deployed in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and joined the 280,000 women veterans who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq. We also know that women face extreme barriers to accessing health care or mental health care and often face many obstacles.

SB 81 takes an important step in addressing long standing difficulties and honoring the service of all veterans with improved access and care. Thank you for your positive consideration.

Sincerely,

Nikki Fisher, OCFW Commissioner

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