

Testimony of Congresswoman Julia Brownley
California's 26th Congressional District
Before the House Armed Services Committee
Member Day
May 5, 2021

Good Morning Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Rogers.

Thank you for holding today's hearing.

As you may know, for more than two years, I have had the privilege to Chair the Women Veterans Task Force.

Since its founding, the Task Force has worked to identify and eliminate inequities facing millions of women who have served in our nation's military.

Through our work, we have identified two specific issues, which I hope we can address in the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act.

First, over the past few years, I have heard directly from many servicemembers and veterans about gender disparities in out-of-pocket costs for uniforms.

The 2020 NDAA included my amendment directing GAO to review these issues.

In February, GAO released its report, which found that across all branches of service and ranks, women pay several times more for uniforms than men.

GAO also found that the armed services were not accounting for the cost of uniform changes to servicemembers.

Over a 20-year career, an enlisted female Marine will pay nearly 10 times more out-of-pocket than a male Marine.

In the Army, female enlisted soldiers will pay nearly \$4000 more – or double – what enlisted men pay.

In the Air Force, over 20 years, enlisted women will pay \$1,627 out-of-pocket, but enlisted men will have a surplus of approximately \$2000.

In the Navy, women pay approximately three times as much over a 20-year career.

To make matters worse, the Navy and Marine Corps have made uniform changes that have *only* impacted women.

Further, none of the services collect uniform data for officers -- because all officers pay for their uniforms out-of-pocket.

In fact, GAO found that in the last 10 years, the Navy alone has made 18 changes to uniforms that disproportionately increased costs for female officers.

These cost disparities add up to hundreds or thousands of dollars.

To fix this, I recently introduced the Equal Pay for Servicewomen Act (H.R. 2502) along with Congresswomen Speier and Stefanik.

Our bipartisan bill would eliminate the unfair and sexist “pink tax” on women’s uniforms.

My bill would incorporate all of the recommendations of the GAO report, which:

- Mandate greater oversight by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness,

The bill would also:

- Require the services to ensure that “like” uniform items cost the same for men and women, and
- Authorize back pay for servicewomen for up to 10 years to cover the lost wages due to disparities in uniform cost.

As long as women are forced to pay more than men for required uniforms, the Department of Defense’s principle of equal pay for equal work is not being upheld.

I urge the Committee to include this legislation in the 2022 NDAA.

Second, I request the Committee include the Justice for Servicewomen Act (H.R. 2385) in the 2022 NDAA.

This bill would direct GAO to conduct a study regarding women involuntarily separated or discharged due to pregnancy or parenthood.

As you know, women were made permanent members of the armed forces in 1948.

However, between 1951 and 1976, the military summarily discharged women who became pregnant, gave birth, or became a parent or stepparent through adoption or marriage.

From 1969 to 1973, during the Vietnam War, the Army alone discharged more than 5000 enlisted women for pregnancy and parenthood.

These policies were ruled unconstitutional in 1976.

However, no action was taken to redress this wrong, or to ensure these women were compensated or provided veterans' services they were owed.

My bill is a first step in assessing the impact of this discriminatory policy.

It requires GAO to identify the number of women affected, assess racial and ethnic disparities, and review the impact of involuntary discharges on women's access to benefits.

Under my bill, GAO is further directed to provide recommendations for restoring access to resources that have, for too long, been denied these women veterans.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting our service women, who patriotically served our nation, and whose constitutional rights were violated.

I thank the committee for your consideration.

I yield back.