



CONGRESSMAN
ANDY BARR



REPRESENTING THE SIXTH DISTRICT OF KENTUCKY

Congressman Andy Barr's Testimony Before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs Legislative Hearing On Community Care

Tuesday, October 24, 2017

Good morning. I would first like to thank Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz for allowing me the opportunity to speak before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee this morning about providing access to community care for survivors of military sexual assault (MST), which my legislation, H.R. 3642, the Military Sexual Assault Victims Empowerment Act also known as the Military SAVE Act helps to improve.

According to the findings of the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Screening Program, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 100 men revealed that they have been victims of military sexual assault during their time serving in the military. This problem was first brought to my attention by a group of women in the Sixth Congressional District of Kentucky, led by MST survivor Karen Tufts. Sadly, due in-part to this emotional stress, two of these women have since committed suicide.

In fact, according to independent nation-wide studies conducted by the National Victims Center, the Medical University of South Carolina, and Florida State University, research has found that female victims of MST are 14 times more likely to commit suicide than women who have never been assaulted.

In addition, according to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, sexual assault is also commonly associated with adverse mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and non-suicidal self-injury, which are also commonly associated with suicidal ideation, attempts, and death by suicide.

While Congress has taken several actions recently to better protect survivors of MST within the military justice system, many survivors have expressed concern that services available within the

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system may still not match their specific post-MST needs.

That is why I have been working closely with this committee, veteran service organizations, and my VA Pilot Program Development Task Force to improve medical care for survivors of MST, in order to help get those survivors the care that best fits their unique physical and psychological needs.

This legislation would allow survivors of MST the ability to seek treatment specifically related to their MST injuries by a private healthcare provider of their choice during a 3 year pilot program. MST survivors would be given a choice to participate in this pilot program or remain in the VA healthcare system for treatment options. Participants in both this pilot program and those being treated within the VA healthcare system for MST related injuries would participate in a pre-treatment and post treatment survey as well as a development survey conducted every six months to study individual progress. This pilot program would study the results of the effects that direct access care provides that the VA does not.

A certified VA researcher will be assigned as a member of the VA Community Care Office, which will ensure the quality and integrity of collecting and analyzing data for the study, which would be submitted to Congress for review.

As I mentioned before, I did not create this legislation alone. It has been through the dedicated support and trusted advice of MST survivors and subject matter experts who are members of my VA Pilot Program Development Task Force. I created this task force by carefully selecting each of these outstanding individuals who helped to develop and determine what the best possible pilot program for MST survivors should look like. Each of these members brought a unique experience and different skillsets to the table, which was ideal for this task force, and I thank them for their contributions.

In conclusion, I ask that my legislation be included in the “Veteran Coordinated Access & Rewarding Experiences (CARE) Act,” in order to help provide survivors, both male and female, the proper medical care that best fits unique medical needs.

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify before this committee today, and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have about my legislation.