



National Association of Black Military Women

**STATEMENT OF
G. PATRICIA JACKSON-KELLEY
NATIONAL PRESIDENT,
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK MILITARY WOMEN (NABMW)**

JULY 23, 2020

H.R. 6039, H.R. 6082, H.R. 4908, H.R. 2791, H.R. 4526, H.R. 3582, H.R. 96, H.R. 4281, H.R. 3010, H.R. 7163, H.R. 7111, H.R. 2435, H.R. 7287, H.R. 3228, H.R. 6141

Dear Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Roe, and Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our views for this legislative hearing. The National Association of Black Military Women was formed in July 1976, by a group of 21 of Black women who served in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and Women's Army Corps (WAC) during World War II, Korean and Vietnam Wars. Since the initial convening, NABMW has established a growing network of thousands of Black Military Women across the nation.

Before delving into the substantive matter before the Committee today, I would like to highlight that this is the first time the NABMW has appeared before the Committee to testify. NABMW is please to offer our views on the bills and hope I hope the Committee continue to amplify the voices of Black Women Veterans in future oversight and legislative hearings during the 116th Congress and beyond.

H.R. 6039 - To require the secretary of Veteran Affairs to seek to enter into an agreement with the city of Vallejo, California for the transfer of Mare Island Naval Cemetery in Vallejo, California for other purposes. **The National Association of Black Military Women Support this.**

H.R. 6082 – Forgotten Vietnam Veterans ACT. **NABMW supports H.R. 6082**- this legislation will reuse the definition of Vietnam Era and adjust the start date to November 1, 1955 from February 28, 1961. By adjusting this date more veterans can qualify combat related benefits and those that were engaged in combat during peace time period would be eligible to receive war time benefits such as a pension.

H.R. 4908 – Native American PACT Act. The National Association of Black Military Women Supports H.R. 4908 which prohibits the collection of healthcare copayments by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from a veteran who is a member of the Indian Tribe. It is an established fact that there is insufficient health care access for this population. This is something that I am well aware of from my time on VA’s Minority Veteran Advisory Committee. During my time I [witnessed or looked into] the utilization rate of Native Americans at VHA and I had [heard or seen] about the health disparities that exist for Native Americans and other minority groups in VHA.

H.R. 2791 Department of Veteran Affairs tribal Advisory Committee Act of 2019. National Association of Black Military Women **DO NOT SUPPORT** this legislation. Having served on the National Center for Minority Veterans Advisory Committee, I am aware of how the Committee works to include Native American Veterans voices and views on the Minority Veterans Advisory Committee. In 1996 Congress established the center to represent minority veterans which includes the Native American veterans. This bill would be a duplication of efforts. This would necessitate other minority groups to call for their own separate Advisory Committees with in VA; whether this is eventually the Committee’s intention I don’t know, but I feel that it would be redundant.

H.R. 4526 National Association of Black Military Women support H.R. 4526 – the Brian Tally VA Employment Transparency Act. Form 95 is the official documentation which supports this request. It should be monitored and reported for failure to so. I applaud the Committee’s decision to codify guidelines for how quickly VA should respond claims that result in damage, injury, or death. The government has a solemn responsibility to act quickly and appropriately when handling claims of this nature. I disability claims.

H.R 3582 - National Association of Black Military Women strongly support this bill to expand the scope of Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans by including gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals as minority group members. There is no current monitoring or reporting of this group of veterans as it relates to programs in relation to Department of Veteran Affairs programs. During my tenure as a Women’s Veteran Program Manager at the largest and most complex medical center, it became within my scope of responsibility to advocate for this important population. It is astounding that eighteen years later this has not been accomplished. I have witnessed how LGBT veterans in the past have been treated. I hope that this is the first sign that VA will start providing better service and care for the ever-growing population of LGBT veterans.

H.R. 96 – National Association of Black Military Women strongly support H.R. 96 which would amend title 38, United States Code to require the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to furnish dental care in the same manner as any other medical care. The Mayo Clinic has done studies that suggest oral bacteria and the inflammation associated with severe form of gum disease (periodontitis) might play a role in diseases in other parts of the parts of the body. The correlation between gum and heart disease is a well documented example of this. Also, certain disease, such as diabetes and HIV/Aids can lower the body's resistance to infection, making oral health problems more severe. Having many negative experiences in this area, it is requested that H.R. 97 be placed on the priority list of implementations. This bill would allow veterans to receive the dental care that they have failed to receive over the years.

H.R. 4281 – NABMW strongly support 4281 which would amend chapter 17, or title 38 United States Code, to direct the secretary of Veterans Affairs to allow a veteran to receive a full year's supply of contraceptive pills, transdermal patches, vaginal ring and for other purposes.

H.R. 3010 - National Association of Black Military Women strongly supports H.R. 3010 Honoring All Veterans Act which add the following as a mission statement for the Department of Veterans Affairs: “to fulfill President Lincoln's promise To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan,” The changing demographics of the VA population makes it imperative that there is a change of culture to accommodate women veterans as well as monitor their needs and respond accordingly.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has stated it has received several complaints about the official motto, which is a quote of Lincoln's second inaugural address in 1865. The VA has used the quote for 59 years that reads “To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphans.” As far back as the tenure of VA Secretary David Shulkin, it has been requested to change the motto. This quote clearly excludes women service members and identifies another obstacle that women veteran face utilizing the VA system. I have spent a lifetime hearing “First impressions are lasting.” You can image my feeling when I enter a VA facility that bears this symbolic exclusion of women's service.

H.R. 7163 – NABMW supports H.R. 7163. This bill requires the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to reduce the back log of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests by 75% within three years of enactment of the bill. Additionally, the VA must reduce the backlog of office of Special Counsel requests made to the VA by 75% within three years of the enactment of the bill.

The VA must determine the types of documents, records, and information that are frequently requested under FOIA and must regularly make such documents, records and information publicly available.

Finally, the VA must request that the office of Government Information Services within the National Archives and Records Administration conduct an assessment of the VA compliance with FOIA.

Any comments on why this is important to NABMW would be great. VA for many years has with held that might bring negative press to the organization, such as, whether minority receive lesser rating than their white counterparts, how historically Black veterans were denied access to their earned benefits such as the GI Bill and the Home Loan program. If data on these on disparities have been requested by FOIA, then data such as this must be released to reconcile with past errors and understand whether these trends still exist.

H.R. 7111 National Association of Black Military Women supports H.R. 7111 which amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to: Require recipients of federal assistance for a major disaster or emergency to sign a statement as a condition of such assistance that acknowledges the requirements relating to duplication of benefits under such act. It also amends the Small Business Act to require notification to recipients of disaster assistance that they may decline to accept a loan, including for any reason relating to eligibility for other federal assistance.

H.R. 2435 – National Association of Black Military Women supports H.R. 2435 which requires the Secretary of Veteran Affairs to establish an interagency task force on the use of public lands to provide medical treatment and therapy to veterans through outdoor recreation. This would occur not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this act. The Secretary of Veterans affairs shall establish a task force to be known as: “Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans”

On a personal note this is my old boss’ bill. Any support that you could lend to this bill would be much appreciated.

H.R. 7287 – NABMW supports H.R. 7287 which clarifies the licensing requirements for contracted medical professionals to perform medical disability examinations for the Department of Veteran Affairs. A large percentage of women veterans have experienced some form of harassment or sexual trauma during their military service placing them at risk by exposing them to non-credentialed/certified practitioners which can promote additional stressors. Several women veterans have identified this as a problem when they are referred outside of the VA system. (Exhibit #1) I assume more was to follow, but any additional explanation would be super helpful to support this bill.

H.R. 3228 – NABMW supports H.R. 3228 which amends, title 38 United States Code, to authorize health professional trainees to provide treatment via telemedicine, and for other purpose.

H.R. 6141 – NABMW supports H.R. 6141. This bill authorizes an appropriation to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for FY 2022 to improve maternity care coordination for women veterans through pregnancy and the one-year postpartum period. It requires the VA to submit a plan to improve maternity care coordination to fulfill the responsibilities and requirements in the Veterans Health Administration Handbook (330.03 or successor handbook).

The bill requires the Government Accounting Office to report on maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity among women veterans, with a focus on racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health outcome.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I am happy to answer any questions you or the Members of the Committee may have.